
The future of electronic entertainment issue#131
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EDGE®
Inside: Japan & the joy of
Previewed: Jade Empire, D
Invisible War, Full Spectrum
Reviewed: Broken Sword
Mario Kart: Double Dash
Prince of Persia, Metal Ar
MoH: Rising Sun, Call of
PS2 online troubles; 'Famit
interview; The making of XC
PLAYSTATION2 | GAMECUBE | XBOX | GBA
Rise of the robots
Edge primes itself for the robot revival
as Atari reveals Transformers Armada





Edge has yet to find a gamer who doesn't like robots. They are undeniably appealing. Cultural commentators have over the years argued their dramatic rise in popularity, particularly in Japan, as the result of a post-WWII generation looking to escape the fallout of one of recent history's most brutal conflicts. When looking to rebuild itself, the defeated country committed to a technology-led progression and the concept of robots formed a natural extension to this movement. Their aspirational qualities – enormous power and (reasonable) invulnerability – reflected both a proud nation's hitherto unchallenged global position while pointing to a brighter and better future.

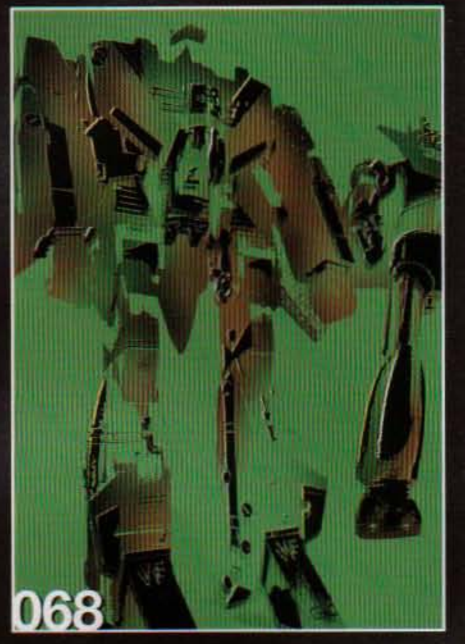
Of course, it's far from a comprehensive explanation. Indeed, **Edge** has come across more interesting – and possibly more accurate – reasoning this month by (quietly) stomping into Bandai's Tokyo headquarters and visiting the company's various mech-related departments – see page 68.

Japan's re-invention of the robot as a hugely desirable entity is massively significant, and it's interesting to note that to date it has rarely been matched by anything conceived in the west. For instance, toys, films and comics dealing with this subject matter will almost invariably feature Japanese creations.

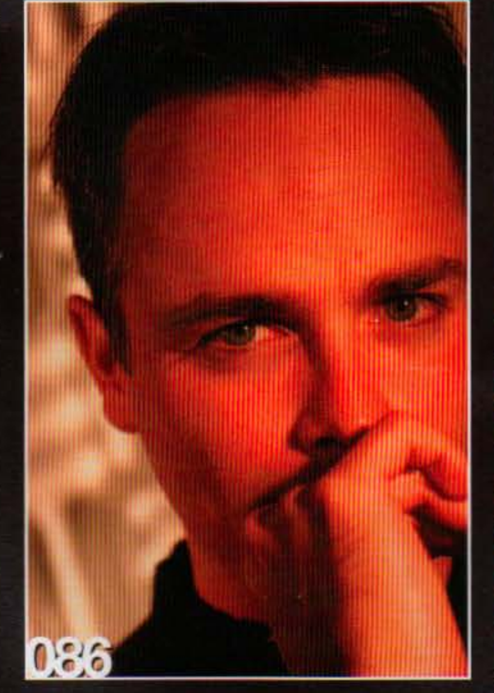
Their influence hasn't ignored videogames, of course, (likely to be regarded as the most appropriate medium by robot fans). We are currently facing something of a resurgence. Without even trying, several robot-featuring titles turned up in time for this month's *Transformers*-led issue. Appropriate, certainly, but the likes of *Gotcha Force* (p39), *Chrome Hound* (p42), *Junk Metal* (p44) and *Metal Arms* (p102) are significant in the way they illustrate the industry's renewed interest in mechs. And with reason – they often make for thoroughly exciting protagonists, combining the most interesting gameplay possibilities with universal appeal. Take a look at this month's cover feature (p54).



Features

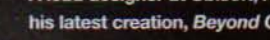












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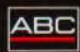
Telephone +44 (0)1225 442244
www.thefuturenetwork.plc.uk





Bath London **Milan** New York **Paris** San Francisco





ABC 27,315
January-June 2003
(Audit Bureau of Circulation)

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Distributed through the UK newstrade by **Seymo**
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directory christmas

the 'we'll miss you taurus' issue

Prescreen

Regulars

Testscreen

Production of Edge
Hardware: Power Macintosh G3, G4
Software: QuarkXPress, Adobe Photoshop, Macromedia FreeHand, and Microsoft Office **Typography:** (Adobe®) Helvetica, Thin, Light, Roman, **Medium**, **Bold**

Printed in the UK by Southernprint, Poole, Dorset

Future Games: the first choice for gamers
Edge is brought to you by Future Publishing Ltd, the makers of PC Gamer, GamesMaster, PlayStation2 Official Magazine-UK, The Official UK PlayStation Magazine, NGC, PSM2, MAX

"This may be hilarious where you come from, but on this planet it's considered rude."

frontend

News and views from e-entertainment's cutting edge



Sony unveils PSP concept

A little silence, please, for we are in the presence of great beauty



Via the medium of a startlingly cheesy PDF slide show, executive deputy president Ken Kutaragi has made the first PSP prototype public at a Sony corporate strategy meeting.

Before settling on this gleaming slab of geometric obsidian for the presentation in New York, Sony is thought to have rejected an SP-style clamshell casing for the PSP, as well as another design modelled on the midget laptop looks of its Clié UX50. While this is a prototype, and may be subject to radical change, **Edge** understands that a number of fully functional units have been manufactured for testing.

The metal-looking flange should make the device feel less fragile, although the deep gloss of the finish and the naked expanse of the screen leaves **Edge** feverish with scratch paranoia. It's believed that there is some kind of screen cover missing from these images, but it's hard to imagine where or how it would attach. **Edge** can't help but assume that, however it works, it must rather ruin the sleek sweep of the machine or it would have made it into the photos.

The last announcement Sony made on the specs for the PSP confirmed an analogue stick as well as two shoulder buttons. These are nowhere to be seen on this model, which fuels feverish speculation. Does the centre of that D-pad have some kind of analogue sensitivity? Could those be huge shoulder paddles on the back? There are also practical questions raised. How much grip will that mirror finish provide when coated with a layer of sweat and oily grime from the Tube? And since you'll need to hold it by the edges rather than sitting it fully in your hands, won't prolonged use make you crampy?

> "While this is a prototype, and may be subject to change, **Edge** understands that a number of fully functional units have been manufactured"

The presentation also gave a few more clues about how Sony expects the PSP to be used. It forms a crucial part of its vision of an out-and-about personal network that will see you receiving broadband broadcasts of music and traffic alerts. It doesn't, however, seem to envisage you using the device at home, where you will be too busy with your twin televisions and robot dog. It's clear that the PSP is being considered the PSX's outdoor twin – a hub for games, movies, photos and music. The 16:9 ratio of the screen certainly gives movie viewing some convincing appeal, and its 4.5 inch size dramatically widens the range of game styles the machine could successfully host.

Although the presentation proclaims that 'entertainment' is the key, the accompanying images suggest that Sony doesn't have anything more concrete in place for the device than a cocktail of existing names along the lines of *Gran Turismo*, Beyoncé and Stuart Little. With dev kits currently on their way to developers, clearer intimations of what's in store should surface in the new year. For now, though, just let your eyes drink in the loveliness. After the clumsy compromise of the N-Gage and the pale anonymity of the PSX, **Edge** can't wait to get to peel the wrapping off something so heart-achingly covetable.

For more info visit www.sony.net/SonyInfo/IR

Riding the rollercoaster

It's a topsy-turvy world. GameCube's sales have rocketed while PlayStation2's have stalled. So is this the start of the next console transition or just an outcome of longterm strategic planning?

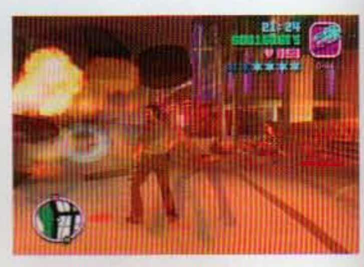
It's fair to say game developers and publishers suffer from more than their share of fluctuations in circumstance and fate. But beneath the regular arrows of outrageous misfortune and luck flow the fundamental tides of the industry as controlled by the console manufacturers.

Like Homer's bickering Greek gods, they alone have the ultimate power to turn the tap of demand. Witness the remarkable fourfold increase in GameCube hardware sales following Nintendo's slashing of the UK price to £79 (99 in Europe, $99 in the US). If any publisher other than Nintendo actually released games for the console, they'd be laughing all the way to the bank.

And it's this sort of seemingly unpredictable move that underlies the importance of understanding the industry's cyclical behaviour. Just as leaves turning brown herald the start of autumn, so hardware price-cuts signal the coming pains of the next industry transition.

These are the periods when consoles are reduced to giveaway items, soon to be replaced with the must-have spanking new boxes. Get the transition right, so the theory goes, and it's five years of plenty ahoy.





US analysts at both DFC and Strategic Analytics predict North American hardware sales will peak during 2003, although there is scope for Sony to revive sales in 2004 and 2005

Look at companies like EA, Rockstar, Criterion and Free Radical Design. Each, in their own way, set itself up early for PlayStation2's dominance, and they have since reaped the rewards. Companies who got it wrong however, such as Core Design, Oddworld Inhabitants and Namco, have been struggling ever since.

For this reason real interest is being expressed in Nintendo's current pricing strategy. With the GameCube already priced at rock-bottom, the current glut of sales is only sucking forward purchases that otherwise would have occurred during 2004 and 2005. In that context, the move can be viewed as a last-ditch attempt to get gamers, publishers and retailers back in love with the Nintendo brand. Alternatively, it could be the result of a corporate decision to launch its next-generation hardware earlier than expected, or at the very least ship a GameCube v1.5, perhaps with inbuilt online adapter, in 2004.

Such conclusions are why so much time and money is spent second-guessing each move and snatched rumour from the console manufacturers. Now is the time when market analysts earn their keep. Every time Sony's Ken Kutaragi looks a bit pale and sneezes, or Microsoft's Robbie Bach says 'Awesome!' with slightly more feeling than normal, the analysts suck their teeth, adjust their predictions and advise their clients. With conventional wisdom suggesting the next round of console releases will not start until at least 2005, Nintendo's move could herald a shift in the hardware timescales.

Sony stutter

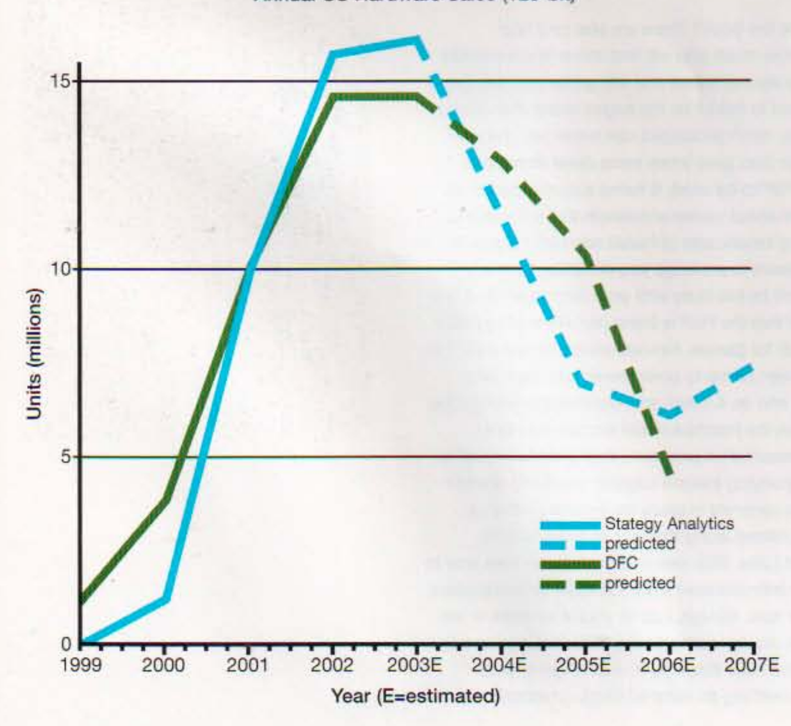
It's not only Nintendo which is making news though. A perceived waning in the power of PlayStation2 has been one recent discussion point. Parent company Sony is undergoing a serious three-year, $3b restructuring of its main electronics division as well as laying off 20,000 employees.

PlayStation2 sales have been hit too, with profits at Sony's Computer Entertainment division down 91 per cent over the past three months period. In turn, EA has cut its internal prediction for PlayStation2 sales during 2003 by a million units in the North American market. And this was in addition to Sony's own prediction that it planned to sell 2.5m fewer PlayStation2s globally in the financial year ending March 31, 2004, compared to the 22.5m units sold in the previous year.

Some pundits have suggested this slowdown marks a shorter lifecycle for PlayStation2 compared to PSone, and the early release of PlayStation3. IDG Consulting's analyst **Simon Price**, however, says the fears that PlayStation2 has peaked early are unfounded.

"You have to remember that PlayStation2 still sells for $199 in the US," he points out. "More than 65 per cent of all US PSone sales happened at below $149. That doesn't mean the same thing will happen with PlayStation2, but I think

"Just as leaves turning brown herald the start of autumn, so hardware price-cuts signal the coming pains of the next industry transition"







there will be some lift when the price goes down to $149 and $99."

Screen Digest's **Nick Parker**, once a Sony Computer Entertainment Europe vice president of strategic planning, thinks there's plenty more life left in PlayStation2: "Sony still has some key price points to hit," he explains. "When it dropped PSone's price to £99 five years into its life, the installed base doubled. If this model holds for PlayStation2, Sony could plan a £99 PlayStation2 pricepoint next Christmas and expect to accelerate sales with no further drop until 2006. We're in the eighth year of PSone. PlayStation2 could have a nine to ten-year lifecycle."

Bizarrely, therefore, the current slowness of PlayStation2 sales is more likely to point to Sony's wanting to prolong its lifecycle because PlayStation3 won't be released until 2006.

Learning the lessons

One reason the industry is sensitive to such transitional issues is that so many companies got it wrong last time round.

With even Sony seemingly entranced by the hype surrounding PlayStation2, many publishers and developers dropped support for PSone, despite its huge installed base, for PlayStation2 – a console which was bedevilled by supply constraints.

"Publishers left the PSone short of key properties as they jumped onto PlayStation2, but those who continued to support PSone saw good returns," recalls **Richard Leinfellner**, EA Europe's vice president of production. Cannily, EA released its first *Harry Potter* game on PSone and PC, not PlayStation2, and generated huge sales in the process.

Leinfellner also points out that the sheer technical challenge offered by PlayStation2 made the transition more damaging than it otherwise might have been. "During the last platform transition, the industry faced totally new technology which was so superior to the previous generation. With good planning, good tools and focus, the next one should be smoother," he reckons.

One element of maintaining such smoothness, particularly with regard to financial performance, may be helped by the growing number of non-console gaming platforms. "The PC games market has proven its ability to act as a stabilising force when console sales are down," explains Datamonitor's **Frederic Diot**. As an upgradeable piece of hardware, the PC market always gets a boost during console transitions, as it's then the most powerful gaming platform, thanks to the efforts of graphics companies such as ATI and nVidia.

"I think Sony's PSP and Nintendo's GBA

Don't peak too soon

Conventional wisdom suggests that the games industry peaks three or four years after each generation of game consoles have launched. With PlayStation2 launching in 2000 and Xbox and GameCube in 2001, this suggests hardware unit sales should peak in 2004, followed by software units sales in 2005. Software sales by value should peak in 2004 as game prices tend to fall as consoles become more mass market. However, with Sony predicting US PlayStation2 sales will fall in 2003, GameCube's price cut boosting its sales (both hardware and software), and the Japanese market already in decline, it may be that hardware sales will peak in 2003 instead.

"There is a sense of worry in the US that hardware sales may have peaked already - certainly we don't currently expect much growth this year in the absence of a price cut," says IDG's Simon Price. "That said, a healthy price cut in 2004 could see sales grow again, so we may not see the peak until next year."

Nick Gibson of Games Investor Consulting agrees that the market is currently difficult to predict. "I think 2004 will see a broadly similar (if not marginally lower) number of hardware shipments as 2003, although much will depend upon the timing of future price reductions."

Meanwhile Datamonitor's Frederic Diot sees 2004 as the peak. "I believe 2004 will be the peak year for Europe, with the US also peaking in 2004 but earlier than Europe," he says.

Launch time

We asked three analysts when they predicted the next round of consoles would launch

Simon Price, IDG Consulting
"I think Nintendo and Microsoft will launch first. Nintendo has most to lose from 'hanging on' in the current cycle and the most to gain from launching early, but it must be careful not to 'do a Dreamcast' and be seen as a transitional platform. Microsoft has always maintained that it will launch at or before PlayStation3, and it has the resources to do so. Sony has most to gain from stretching out the current cycle. PlayStation2 has been carrying the overall Sony business and the company can't guarantee it will own the next cycle in the way it dominates this one. I would say 2005 for Nintendo, 2005 or 2006 for Microsoft and 2006 for Sony, unless it is panicked into matching Microsoft's launch."

Frederic Diot, Datamonitor
"I believe it is still Microsoft's strategy to launch before the PlayStation3, or at the very least not to launch too late after it. I believe 2005 would be a logical date for the launch of the PlayStation3 and Xbox2. Nintendo is not well-known for keeping its word when it comes to launch dates. Furthermore, whereas Microsoft and Sony seem to have a clear idea of what their next console will be about, Nintendo is probably still toying with the idea of adding multimedia and connectivity features or not. Therefore I personally think the next Nintendo's console will be launched in 2006. Let's hope I'm wrong or this could spell trouble for Nintendo."

Nick Gibson, Games Investor Consulting
"Sony have been open about when their fabrication facilities will permit mass-production of the Cell chips (effectively early 2006) but the scalable, parallel processing PlayStation3 architecture gives it the potential to alter the product specification at a later stage of hardware design than with previous generations. Microsoft, on the other hand, have stated that they do not wish to allow Sony the sort of lead time enjoyed by PlayStation2 over Xbox. A likely scenario, therefore, is that Microsoft will be first to market by 6-12 months (in 2005) whilst Sony will take the performance crown. Unless there is a dramatic strategic change of direction, Nintendo will launch GameCube2 targetting a considerably younger console demographic."

SP will constitute significant revenue streams," Diot continues. He's less convinced though about the uplift provided by either Nokia's N-Gage phones or Sony's PSX, the home media centre with integrated PlayStation2 functionality.

Leinfellner is looking forward to the PSP, which is due to launch in late 2004 (see p6) as well. "It's exciting, and if it is the new Walkman I expect to see some compelling and unique content. EA is currently following the reports on this platform and other emerging platforms with interest," he reveals. "With killer titles and the correct business model and market penetration they could potentially help with the overall transition, although I think we have at least three more years of great software sales on the current consoles."

Future shock

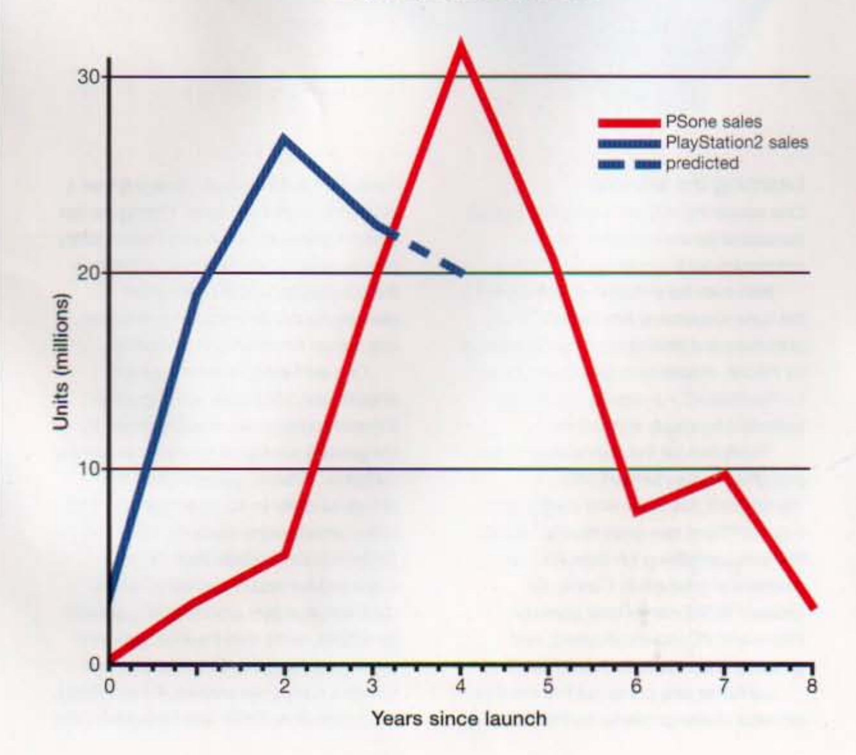
Despite such possibilities, there remain clarion voices warning the next transition won't be straightforward. "The next one is always supposed to be different: last time round it was because PlayStation2 was backwardly compatible and because PC gaming was taking off. This time it's handheld gaming and online. Suffice to say, transitions are always difficult," points out **Robert Smithson**, director at Arete Research Services. "Next time might be 'better', but it will not be easy."

Criterion's **David Lau-Kee** provides another take on the situation. As CEO of a company that provides middleware as well as developing games, he has a unique view on what might occur. "Just as last time, the industry had to change fundamentally how we went about making games, we'll have to change fundamentally again," he predicts. "A lot of the production difficulties today will be amplified from niggling frustrations into make-or-break catastrophes unless we get serious about tackling them."

IDG's Simon Price thinks there could be a sting in the tale too: "In some ways the next transition may be more disruptive than the last, since development costs are higher now," he says.

The other worry remains that the industry may peak earlier than anyone expected. "The fundamental issue is whether the current console cycle is a bigger version of the last one, or a shorter one," Price questions. "My guess is that it's a bit of both. If so, the downturn may be quicker and steeper than last time, and anyone who's not prepared for this will get hit hard."

Yearly Playstation Shipments







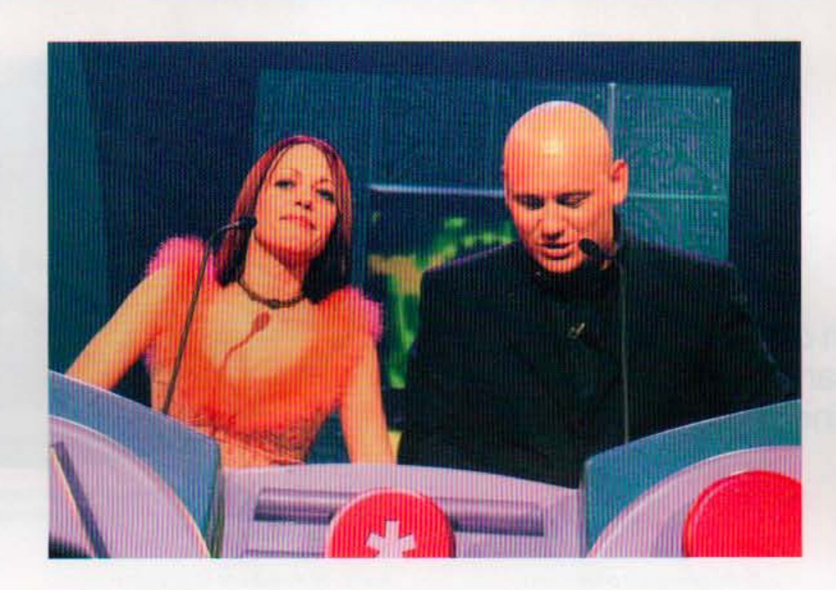
Sony has sold more consoles at a higher price this cycle. The big question is whether the overall market has grown enough to make up for its early success

London's other Games Week

'Game Stars' and ELSPA announce two new UK game shows

The organisers of ITV's 'Game Stars' have announced a major new consumer game show, Game Stars Live, to be held at the ExCeL exhibition centre in London's Docklands from September 1-5, 2004. This news was followed by ELSPA's announcement of its new trade show, the European Game Network, which will run at the same location from September 1-3.

The inaugural 'Game Stars' show, broadcast last Easter, attracted over five million viewers, and the live event is a natural extension of the brand. The success of the PlayStation Experience has revealed the extent of consumer hunger for large game shows, and Game Stars Live's multi-format event should attract even more gamers. Backed by media support from Capital FM, XFM, GAME and an as-yet-unannounced national newspaper, the show presents a real opportunity to dramatically raise the public profile of gaming. The show has already attracted support from publishers such as EA, THQ and Eidos, and will feature game challenges, Europe's largest LAN party, and a Get Into Gaming careers advice zone.



"These new events send out fragmented signals at a time when the industry is trying to present a coherent identity"

ELSPA's announcement is more controversial. Scheduled in direct conflict with ECTS, it seems a calculated effort to undermine the older show. However, the planned atmosphere for EGN is deliberately low key. Describing it as a show 'free of hype in a structured environment with a cost-effective, standardised exhibition format, and a heavy emphasis on pre-scheduled meetings', ELSPA acknowledges that it amounts to a radical format, but argues that it is one designed in response to industry requirements. The show is geared to meet the needs of VIPs and 'higher tier' delegates who will receive invitations to the event, free entry and access to on online meeting planner to allow them to co-ordinate their meetings with exhibitors.

ECTS organisers have made their disappointment clear at ELSPA's choice of timing. Speaking on behalf of CMP, the show's organisers, **Dean Barrett** commented: "I don't know exactly what was behind their decision to go head-to-head with ECTS, but I don't think the timing of the event is an accident. You would have thought that a trade organisation would want to do more to smooth things over." ECTS has no plans to change its approach to its event next year, suggesting that EGN's 'elitist approach', out of town location and untried format all add up to a big gamble.



Granada has already confirmed next year's Game Stars awards, and will film a show at the Live event to be broadcast in the autumn

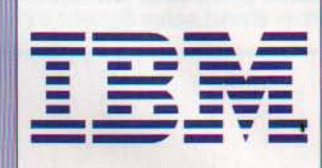
Having just moved towards a more unified front with the launch of the London Game Week banner, there's no question that these new events send out fragmented signals at a time when the industry is trying to present a coherent identity. It remains to be seen if the expansion of London's gaming summer will sap support across all events, or evolve into a national focus with something to offer everyone involved with every aspect of gaming. **Edge** sincerely hopes the latter.





Sony is yet to confirm details of next year's PlayStation Experience; the decisions it makes about where and when and if to hold it may tip the balance between Earl's Court and ExCeL

CUTTINGS



Microsoft chooses IBM for Xbox2

Microsoft and IBM have announced a technology agreement that will see the latter providing the CPU for the next-generation successor to Xbox – ending Microsoft's current association with Intel, which manufactures the chip at the heart of the current Xbox. While ATI is set to provide the next-generation GPU, IBM will provide the main processor, so any prospective backward compatibility will have to be achieved via emulation. The deal is good news for IBM, which is now set to provide the CPU technology behind all three major next-generation platforms, including Sony's Cell technology and the successor to Nintendo's GameCube.

Wizards sues Nintendo

Trading card game manufacturer Wizards of the Coast has sued Nintendo for breach of contract and patent infringement concerning the Pokémon trading-card game. In a lawsuit filed last month, the publisher of 'Dungeons & Dragons' and 'Magic: The Gathering', accused Nintendo affiliate Pokémon USA of abandoning a contract with WotC but continuing to use the company's patented methods and technology to manufacture the cards, and hiring two former WotC executives – Richard Arons and Rene Flores. WotC claims that Pokémon USA refused to allow the company to release two expansion packs that had already been developed and manufactured at substantial cost.

More woes for UK coding scene

There were more high-profile casualties of the malaise affecting independent development in the UK this month as Computer Artworks, developer of *The Thing*, and Mucky Foot, of *Startopia* fame, each went under, with all staff being made redundant. In the case of Computer Artworks, the news is especially surprising since the company is believed to have been working on at least three titles. Mucky Foot's closure is thought to be due to a publisher cancelling a work-in-progress.

Low key launch for N-Gage

Mobile gamedeck launched with a bang or a whimper, depending on who you asked, with a row about sales figures overshadowing the achievement of Nokia's global launch

The UK rollout of Nokia's N-Gage gamedeck, which took place on October 7, was rather muted compared to the celeb-studded launches and in-store promotions taking place across the rest of the globe. With locations from Australia to Thailand, and beyond, benefiting from various launch promotions, the lack of any midnight launches or star appearances



Still mistargeted, as a games console it doesn't work without a SIM card, and the lack of a pay-as-you-go market cuts off what would seem to be its most suitable audience

"People are persisting in comparing N-Gage with an old-fashioned handheld console. That's not what it is; it's an online games engine"



resulted in a low-key launch by regular console standards, but it was overshadowed in the ensuing days, by a high-profile spat about sales figures.

The dispute started with the release of ChartTrack's sales figures, which encompass most major videogame retailers. ChartTrack's figures, which were widely reported by online news sites, suggested that less than 500 gamedecks were sold over its launch weekend, with less than 800 sales during its first fortnight on sale. The disagreement then moved onto the pages of trade paper 'MCV', in which Nokia pointed out that ChartTrack's figures don't include sales through dedicated phone retailers – where the device was more likely to be discounted from its £229 RRP. Finally, the action moved onto news outlets such as Reuters, which quoted Nokia's Ilkka Raiskinen, who cited global shipments of 400,000 units in the first two weeks, and argued that many retailers had sold out of their first shipment and re-ordered.

Whether the launch has gone well enough to sell the targeted 6–9m units before the end of 2004 remains to be seen. With the growth in handset sales slowing down, the games sector is clearly of significant importance for Nokia.

Edge spoke to **Mark Squires**, Nokia UK's director of communications, to discuss the reception of its gamedeck, and how the company plans to surmount its difficult launch (see opposite).

That game line-up in full

Pandemonium!

Publisher: **Eidos**



Despite being highly unsuitable for the portrait screen, *Pandemonium* preserves its sense of giddy momentum, especially when you race against downloaded ghosts

PuyoPop

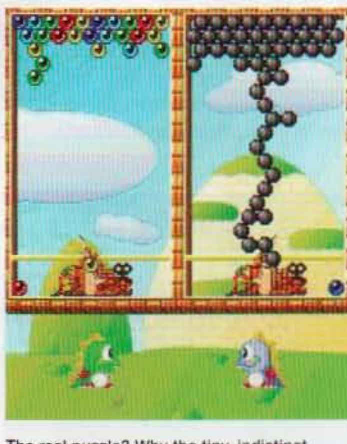
Publisher: **Sega**



It's *Puyo Puyo*. It's accessible, demanding, quick fix puzzling. It's Bluetooth twoplayer. Very little could have gone wrong, and very little, **Edge** is happy to say, has gone wrong

Puzzle Bobble

Publisher: **Taito**



The real puzzle? Why the tiny, indistinct pointer drags reluctantly across the screen before squeezing off a ball which inches up towards just where you hadn't aimed it

Q&A

Edge talks to Mark Squires, Nokia UK's director of communications...

How has the launch of N-Gage gone?
Well. To be quite honest the initial sales of the N-Gage have been really promising. You've probably seen the figures that Ilkka Raiskinen, our senior VP of games put out, that we actually sold 400,000 units globally in the first couple of weeks.

Are they sales to operators though, or sales to consumers?
They're sales out of the door from us – as a manufacturer, that's all we can count to be quite honest. It's impossible once they've gone through the distribution channel to work out what's going on. What we can say is that people like The Carphone Warehouse have gone to press to say that they've sold out and are re-ordering, and we are shipping re-orders, so we're reasonably confident that the sell-through has been pretty positive.

What about software sales figures?
I don't have those figures for the game titles. The sales that we've seen so far have been really strong, and the interesting thing is that the strongest selling titles have been those games that have the N-Gage Arena functionality.

Does Nokia have any way of measuring the multiplayer usage?
Yes, we can tell what's going on. The one figure I do have is that in the first ten days that the N-Gage Arena was up and running, there were 5,000 online game sessions playing each day. So we're pretty happy with that – that's a great penetration. Have you actually played any of the games yourself; have you seen what happens?

We were loaned an N-Gage a while ago...
The biggest problem that we're finding is that most people writing about the N-Gage have never played a game on it and never experienced the boot-up sequence of a game that asks you if you want to go online. As soon as you kick in, with say *Pandemonium!*, you immediately get the world top 20. It takes about 15 to 20 seconds to download your opponent for you to ghost-race against. I just like to check because that's our biggest issue; people writing about N-Gage are persisting in comparing it with a static, old-fashioned handheld console. That's not what it is; it's an online games engine. The problem with that is that there's very little to compare it with because there isn't anything else existing out there that can touch it.

Do you think that it's been a mistake to target it so heavily at the hardcore gamer? Surely the most likely people to buy N-Gage are people who are upgrading their phone and might see games as an added extra to the MP3 functionality and stuff.
I think that's completely off whack, because if they were upgrading their phone and were buying it for the MP3 functionality then they could buy a Nokia 3300, which is exactly the same format as the N-Gage without the games – it has the MP3 and the phone. Nokia doesn't divide handsets into cheap one, dear one, business one, games one. We rely on our user base breaking into four categories. Last year we launched 32 discrete Nokia Mobile Phone products in the mobility area, each of which was addressing a different market need as we saw it from our consumers. Our customers told us in no uncertain terms that they liked Java games but they wanted better games. So we built a proper games console. That's the issue that people are having trouble getting to grips with. We've built a games console. Okay, we've happened to put a phone in it because we know about making phones, but the fact is that it was a games console that we set out to build.

Can you comment on rumours about N-Gage 2?
I'm not going to speculate; you know perfectly well that Nokia never pre-announces products. We're a very unusual company in that respect; about six months before they hit the market we tell you guys in the press exactly what hardware we're working on. We finalise hardware then we finalise software, so all I would say to you is that we are constantly working on new products, and I think that you'll understand that N-Gage is a little bit more than just one games console; it's an arena, it's an online system, and we're obviously looking to the future with interest.

What about online reports that the device has had its price cut in the US?
Not that I've heard of. In the UK it's been well-documented that some operators are offering the N-Gage with certain contracts at no cost at all; others have seen successful sales by doing games bundles. Each to their own I think, but as a manufacturer we can only make the hardware, we can't dictate the way it's brought to the market.

How enthusiastic have phone operators and retailers been about the N-Gage?
Well the phone operators and the phone retailers have been extremely enthusiastic – particularly the distributors. They see the games market as a whole new opportunity. The games sector hasn't been quite so quick to grasp the opportunity, but I think it's dawned on them now because we've seen an increase in their activity. There have been an awful lot of independents in the games channel that have done very well. It's not unusual when you get a specialised product to find that people who have got the time to sit down and understand it and take their customers through it appear to do better in the first flush.

For whatever reason though, the positive sentiment is outweighed by cynicism...
Let me put something to you. I believe that I'm unusual among the people you talk to as a comms manager because I actually built a Nascom and programmed, over 14 days, a *Space Invaders* game. I even had a Norman Pong machine – we brought one into Phillips when I worked there, for the canteen. I can remember the entire videogame industry; I can't remember a time when it hasn't been cynical. There's always cynicism. I made a comment the other day, which I stand by, which is that things that are slagged off when they're brought out are now looked back on with enormous fondness. When the Dreamcast was struggling, everyone was kicking it. As soon as it disappeared, everyone started saying what a great console it was.

But what does Nokia have lined up to prevent the N-Gage meeting a similar fate?
We have a unique proposition; we have 50 to 100 more games coming before the end of 2004; we have online games such as *Pathway to Glory*, the like of which players will have never seen before; and we have several years' experience of making handheld units in a very fast and competitive environment and we're bringing the full weight of that to this part of the industry.

Anyone who thinks that we're just playing at this is in for a very rude shock over the next few months. This is a deadly serious activity to Nokia; this is where we see the future of part of our organisation lying and we're addressing that in the best way we know, which is to provide our customers with the products they want. A few cynical reports are something you have to put up with, but we're willing to take that pain over the short-term because we know we're in the market for the long-term future.

The feedback we're getting is great. The guys who aren't negative are the actual gamers. It's been quite nice watching the bulletin boards start to swing round over the past week as people have actually got the unit in their hands. I think if you've played a game like *Pandemonium!* on another console, you might think it's not a bad game. When you play it on a small handheld unit, with great graphics, but you also have the additional factor of trying to beat the ghost of someone you don't know who happens to be the world's number one, and you get close to matching it, that's a whole new level of gaming experience that most gamers haven't actually come to terms with yet. And when they do, they won't want to go back.

SonicN

Publisher: **Sega**



There's a horrible moment when you fear it might be Sonic slo-mo, but the blistering pace and the thirst for exploration soon kick in as tiny tantalising ring clusters flash past

Super Monkey Ball

Publisher: **Sega**



If it wasn't for the Fight, Target and Race sweeteners, there would be nothing to redeem the flabby controls, awkward camera and mean omission of twoplayer options

Tomb Raider

Publisher: **Eidos**



The on/off toggled run is a bold but counter intuitive decision, but the high quality of the original's art direction shines through the game's unsuitablility for gaming on the go

Tony Hawk's Pro Skater

Publisher: **Activision**



Limited in scope and scale from the original, *Tony Hawk's* still makes the transition in recognisable shape. The button layout and D-pad take a little getting used to, however

Sony unveils Central Station for online gaming

The consumer experience of console online gaming is about to get simplified for PlayStation2 owners

Sony's rollout of its online service for PlayStation2 may be moving at an agonisingly slow pace, but at least it's making progress.

No sign yet of a hard disc drive to facilitate downloadable content, but December will see the launch of Central Station – a service that unites Sony's previously disparate online offerings.

In essence, Central Station is Sony's response to the much-praised Xbox Live system. Sony's laissez-faire policy towards a unified online experience has been capitalised on by big publishers such as EA, who have taken the opportunity to establish their own branded online universes.

However, smaller publishers have found the lack of technical support from Sony to be a major stumbling block. In addition, the consumer's experience of going online with the PS2 has been untidy.

For online gaming virgins, the experience of joining a random game of *SOCOM: US Navy SEALs* only to be killed within seconds and ridiculed by the assembled hardcore is deflating.

Online gaming has cultural as well as technical barriers to surmount if it is to appeal to the mainstream, as Sony hopes, and one of the aims behind Central Station is to allow players to set up games with their friends or opponents of a similar skill level with ease.

Anyone inserting a Network Access Disc into his or her PS2 after the (still slightly uncertain) launch date will be directed to Central Station. Entry is password protected, although users will be allowed to invent several different handles. A personalised homepage will then show details of Sony-organised tournaments and leagues as well as news related to online PS2 gaming.

Those features in full...

Central Station boasts the following features:

Unique ID – for every player
Friends Lists – and the ability to set up rankings tables with friends
Lobbies – that allow you to choose random opponents
Communication – from one-touch taunts to voice chat
Community support – users can report or block unruly players
Leagues and tournaments – aimed at a range of abilities
Skill-matching



In addition to the launch of Sony's Central Station, consumers are also set to benefit from BT's new gaming package, which combines a router with plenty of technical support

Users have access to a message service, although they won't be allowed to correspond with anyone outside the Central Station universe. Sony expects friends to communicate in order to arrange times to meet online and play.

A unique user profile will track performance in online games, allowing the service to match players with opponents of a similar standard if desired.

Arguably the most exciting aspect of the service, from a player point of view, will be the opportunity to compete for prizes in all kinds of online gaming leagues and tournaments, advertised on the Central Station homepage. Sony has already been pleased with the response to its beta test competitions, and it promises a strong moderator presence in order to combat the inevitable attempts to cheat.

Central Station will only support first-party online games at launch, which effectively means just *SOCOM*, *Hardware* and *Destruction Derby*, with *Gran Turismo 4* to follow next year. Sony expects some thirdparty publishers to sign up although there's nothing confirmed as yet.

Teething troubles

Though Central Station will undoubtedly tidy up the consumer experience of online PlayStation2 gaming, publishers and developers are still having difficulty adapting to the discrepancies in technical standards across the globe. While standards are similar between the US and Japan, **Edge**'s sources are critical of Sony's failure to make it easier to convert online functionality for PAL releases.

Consequently, major publishers are choosing not to implement online functions in Europe rather than risk inadequate performance and customer dissatisfaction. EA, for example, has only recently started to offer online gameplay across some of its titles, and even then games such as *Tiger Woods*, which are online in the US, have been stripped of their connectivity over here. Capcom, too, is reportedly considering either not shipping titles such as *Resident Evil Outbreak* and *Monster Hunter*, or stripping them of their online functions.

A Sony spokesperson was unavailable for comment on the issue.



Central Station is Sony's bid to match Xbox Live in offering a unified online gaming service to PlayStation2 owners, simplifying the currently complicated process of network gaming

Q&A

BT launches dedicated gaming package

While there are still technical issues that need to be ironed out on the development side of things, the consumer experience of console connectivity is about to become simplified with the launch of BT's dedicated console gaming broadband package. **Edge** spoke to **Chris Jones**, head of BT Partnerships, to find out more...

Could you give a general overview of your console gaming product?
We have launched a broadband product which is similar to our standard broadband product, but instead of coming with a USB modem, which is PC-centric, we've launched a product that comes with a router modem. This gives a gamer the opportunity to connect their Xbox or PlayStation2 to the router as well as their PC so they can use them all at the same time. Going one step further, it's about support as well. Whereas a customer buying a USB modem and then buying their own router will be reliant on technical support from different areas, what we're doing is supporting the whole product, and working with Sony and Microsoft on any issues to do with the consoles. So it's a one-stop-shop for support.

And using a router, you can plug your console straight into the wall...
You just plug them into the router and the router plugs into the wall. We did a lot of testing with Sony and Microsoft and it worked every time.

How important is console gaming to BT, and to driving the uptake of broadband?
It's very important because when you look at the first million customers who have ADSL, they've gone for speed, but the next million will be about applications and content. Console gaming isn't the killer app that will drive all broadband growth, but it will give people another reason to get broadband. So for us it's an important part of our broadband growth going forward to 2006, and we've got a target of getting five million broadband customers. We reached a million customers in the summer, ahead of schedule.

Where does this package leave PC gaming?
PC Gaming is big, and people who want to play PC games can do that on USB modems today. What is exciting about online console gaming is the size of the potential market – based on the Screen Digest numbers – 1.4million online console gamers in the UK by 2006 is a huge growth.

Is that a realistic figure though? The figures released by Microsoft suggest quite a slow take-up of online console gaming, for example.
Again, when you look at the market, by the end of September this year approximately 55,000 Xbox Live network adapters had been sold in the UK, and that's set to grow to 100,000 by Christmas. So this market is growing. It's not a mature market, but it's going to grow considerably. What's important is that console manufacturers, telcos, ISPs and games publishers all work together, as we've been trying to do. We think this is a growth market and that's why we're pushing it.

Recently Reviewed

Edge brings you a rundown of last issue's review scores

Title	Platform	Publisher	Developer	Score
Disgaea: Hour of Darkness	PS2	Atlus	Nippon Ichi	9
Halo: Combat Evolved	PC	Microsoft Game Studios	Gearbox Software	9
Drag-On Dragoon	PS2	Square Enix	Cavia	8
Dynasty Tactics 2	PS2	Koei	In-house	8
Gregory Horror Show	PS2	Capcom	In-house	8
Maximo vs Army of Zin	PS2	Capcom	In-house	8
SSX3	PS2/GC/Xbox	Electronic Arts	In-house	8
Billy Hatcher and the Giant Egg	GC	Sega	Sonic Team	7
Final Fantasy Tactics Advance	GBA	Nintendo	Square Enix	7
Flipnic	PS2	SCEI	In-house	7
Ratchet & Clank 2: Locked and Loaded	PS2	SCEE	Insomniac Games	7
Worms 3D	Xbox/PS2/GC/PC/Mac	Sega	Team 17	7
XIII	Xbox/PS2/GC/PC	Ubisoft	In-house	7
Border Down	DC/Arcade	Sega	G-Revolution	6
Commandos 3: Destination Berlin	PC	Eidos	Pyro Studios	6
Hardware: Online Arena	PS2	SCEE	In-house	6
Time Crisis 3	PS2	SCEE	Namco	6
Vega$: Make it Big	PC	Empire Interactive	Deep Red	6
Star Wars Rogue Squadron III: Rebel Strike	GC	Activision	Factor 5	5
Banjo Kazooie: Grunty's Revenge	GBA	THQ	Rare	4
Voodoo Vince	Xbox	Microsoft Game Studios	Beep Industries	4



Disgaea: Hour of Darkness


Gregory Horror Show


Flipnic


XIII

CUTTINGS



Midway signs *Daikatana* designer
Ex-Ion Storm bigwigs John Romero (fresh from his appearance at the woeful N-Gage launch at this year's E3) and Tom Hall have resurfaced at Midway's San Diego development studio. Most recently to be found at their handheld development studio, Monkeystone Games, Romero will join the company as project lead on a *Gauntlet* remake, while Hall is to become creative director. There is as yet no indication as to what this means for the future of Monkeystone Games.

Microsoft and Sony release financial results
Sony and Microsoft reported contrasting financial fortunes this month. Sony reported a 25 per cent drop in its quarterly profits, partly due to a drop in hardware sales in the games division. The company also reported a drop in operating profits within the games division of 91 per cent due to research and development costs for next generation hardware. It was a weak performance for the company, in contrast to Microsoft's performance, which produced better than expected results for the first quarter of its financial year, seeing revenues for its Home and Entertainment division increasing by some 20 per cent.

Future acquires Computec
Edge's publisher, Future Publishing, has acquired the publisher of PSW and XBW, Computec UK. The Future Network has conditionally agreed to acquire Computec Media UK from its parent company, Computec Media AG, for £3.2m which will be funded by Future's cash resources.

The deal will see Computec's videogame titles PSW, and Xbox World join a videogame portfolio that already includes The Official PlayStation2 Magazine, PC Gamer, GamesMaster and NGC.

www.cash-u.com

Ringing the slow changes

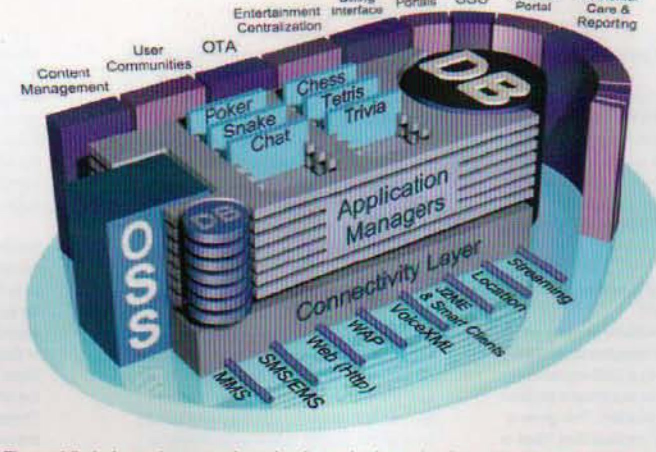
The mobile industry is a mess when it comes to gaming but Cash-U's Pecan entertainment platform demonstrates the seeds of a better future

Mobile entertainment is taking baby steps towards maturity, but at least those tiny feet are heading in the right direction. The problem is clear. While the console game business is driven by purity – dedicated devices designed for high-quality gaming – mobile pioneers are hamstrung by myriad mutually exclusive goals.

Not only are there hundreds of different handsets available, but perhaps even more confusing is the impact of network operators such as T-Mobile and Vodafone. For example, imagine having to buy a separate console to play the games of each publisher. An EA-PlayStation2 2004 might sit alongside an Acclaim-PlayStation2 XXX, to say nothing of the Take 2-PlayStation2 with Drive-By-Boy attachment. No wonder analysts' visions of a mobile entertainment business worth $10b by 2005 have slowly faded to 2008 and beyond.

But back to those baby steps. With standardisation on handset hardware slowly coalescing around technologies such as Java's JSR and MIDP frameworks, the next big area to tackle is the back-end infrastructure, which controls things like content delivery and game servers. One example of progress in the right direction is Cash-U's Pecan platform.

It's designed to simplify the needs of the mobile network operators to manage and deliver entertainment while providing game developers with a standardised platform both in terms of the operators' distribution system and getting their games working on as many handsets as possible.



The mobile industry is a complex mix of standards, technology, blue boxes and black cylinders. Cash-U's Pecan entertainment platform is designed to make things easier for network operators and mobile entertainment developers

Already in use with companies in Europe and Asia including Vodafone, O2, LG Telecom, and Telefonica, the just-released Pecan 3.0 has two distinct focuses. The first is an attempt to remove some of confusion about what games and other content people can download to their phones. Using a filtering system, Pecan ensures only content that is compatible with your phone can be downloaded. This avoids the disappointment of people who download the latest games only to discover, after they've paid their £5, it requires a more advanced version of Java than is embedded on the phone.

The other big improvement within Pecan is multiplayer gaming. This is seen both on the server-side of the technology, as well as linking into the software development kit (SDK) that mobile game developers use when creating their games. This enables developers to take advantage of features such as better lobby services, so mobile gamers can chat to players within game lobbies as well as inviting them to play games.

To show off Pecan's potential, the company has commissioned two games from UK studios. The first might seem a strange choice for a phone game, but Hailstorm's *The Pool Room* enables twoplayer pool over WAP and the fastest (and more expensive) GPRS connections. Sophisticated physics are also promised. The other, *Lotus Challenge: City Racing*, from Kuju, is perhaps a more obvious application of realtime head-to-head gaming.

"The Lotus game has been designed especially to demonstrate Pecan's multiplayer capabilities such as managing chat room sessions, high-score posting and tournaments, as well as allowing realtime multiplayer gaming over GPRS," explains **Gal Nachum**, a Cash-U co-founder and vice president.

Nachum is particularly keen to point out the difficulties that must be overcome, even using GPRS, to make real-time multiplayer games possible. "The GPRS network remains a limited network," he says. Pecan uses new multicast technology to ensure it uses the available bandwidth as efficiently as possible. Only by developing a small and sophisticated library as part of the SDK have we managed to keep the latency time to less than a second," he says. And while that might not sound like much when matched against the sub-200ms latency typically available for PC games over a dial-up modem, it's pretty impressive for mobiles. The progress of the industry remains pitter-patter, but one day it might yet become a herd of elephants.







One title designed to demonstrate Pecan's potential, especially with respect to realtime multiplayer features, is Kuju's *Lotus Challenge: City Racing*

www.lateralvisions.co.uk

Designed for driving

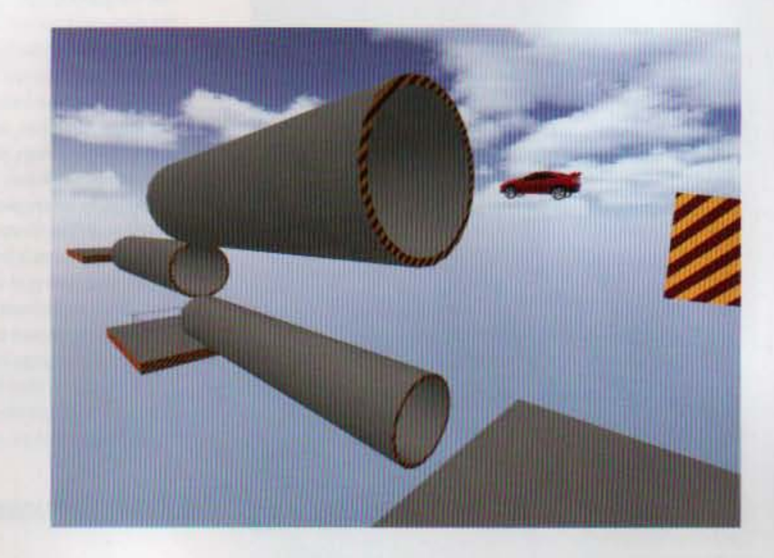
Plenty of racing games have been sold on realistic physics, but Lateral Visions claims its new vehicle physics engine is the closest you can get without sitting at the wheel

There's something evangelical about physics coders. In a sense, theirs is a passion driven by failure. While the world they inhabit is a constant fairground of dynamic interactions, computer games can only offer a crude approximation. The good news, of course, is that as hardware becomes more powerful so the approximation becomes less crude. The bad news is the physics coder always wants more.

"We can model vehicles to an almost ridiculous level of detail," explains **Stephen Clibbery**, technology director at Liverpool-based vehicle-physics start-up Lateral Visions. "One of our basic building block components is a fluid tank, so you can model the effects of using up fuel on a car's dynamics." He stops for second, and thinks. "I suppose if you wanted to get more detail you could model something like a windscreen washer tank, but I don't think it would have much effect on a car's cornering behaviour."

It would perhaps be too easy to insert a joke here about the wood and the trees, but Lateral Visions is not to be made fun of. "We have to consider everything," says managing director **Carl Gavin**. "Some elements that seem completely over-the-top do affect the way a vehicle handles."

One example is the way the company's vehicle physics engine models acceleration. Instead of the simple 'press button, open throttle' mechanic of other driving games, it simulates a foot pressing the pedal, which in turn moves the linkage to the throttle itself. "It's a subtle effect, but there can be lag and non-linearity in the way the acceleration pedal causes the throttle to open," says Gavin.



As can be gathered, Lateral Visions takes cars very seriously. "I want to develop the greatest racing game ever, and in order to do that I need the most kick-ass vehicle physics engine,' Gavin states baldly. That was the reason the company, which consists of various ex-members of Codemasters, was set up 18 months ago.

"I think there's always been this view that realistic physics don't make a great game," says Gavin, who obviously has robust views on the quality of the physics of other driving simulations.

"I'm overly sensitive to the way other racing games handle physics," he admits, "but I think any players, once they've seen how our cars move, will be able to tell that ours look more realistic."

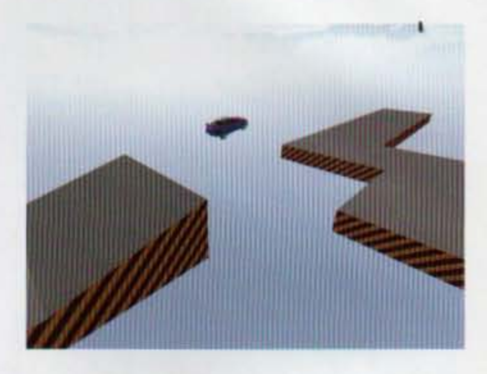
"Our advantage has been we haven't had to make the compromises you need to make when you're trying to get a game finished," points out Clibbery. "We've been able to spend time making sure we get the best solutions to the problem rather than the quickest ones."

There's still some way to go though. Gavin reckons the company has another six months of work to get the technology to a state where other studios will find it useful to license for games, which is stage one of the grand plan. But in the meantime, car companies are already showing interest in using the technology too.

Sometimes it seems attention to detail is never wasted.



Lateral Visions' philosophy of vehicle dynamics is to build and combine detailed components to create a fully-responsive realistic driving engine for each type of car





One novel application of its deadly serious vehicle physics engine is for puzzle games. Lateral Visions jokingly calls this *Gran Turismo* meets *Super Monkey Ball*

Beneath the bonnet

The underlying philosophy behind Lateral Visions' technology is correctly modelling the various components that make up a vehicle. Typically, this includes individual elements such as wheels, suspension, dampers and anti-roll bar, not to mention components such as the engine, fuel tank and steering rack. There's also a highly detailed tyre editor, which models the response of rubber when it meets the road.

Examples of vehicles already created include that perennial favourite the Mini, the Toyota Celica and Nissan's muscle car the 350Z. Each consists of between 50 to 100 separate components. The flexibility of the engine means it should be possible to accurately create a realistic model for any type of wheeled vehicle.

There are some key gameplay advantages of this approach. One is the freeing up of AI drivers from their fixed lines, which in most driving games are pre-calculated on a per-track basis.

Because the AIs are now driving fully-modelled cars, designers will have the opportunity to get their AIs to react to real-time track conditions.

Another neat corollary is force-feedback, which can be generated directly from the physical response of the car as it interacts with the road.

OUT THERE

REPORTAGE



So, here we are then, looking smart, clean-shaven and with fresh breath for a date with a *Final Fantasy* girl...



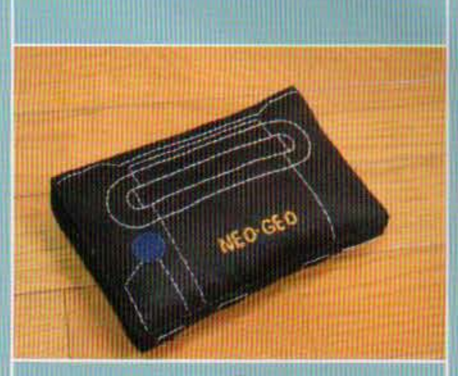
...and YES! Here she is in a very, very short skirt. It's an adolescent forum-botherer's dream come true



Edge is able to guage the mood of a game character with a single glance, and this one looks a bit miffed



What better to snuggle up to at night, dreaming of those *Final Fantasy* girls, than a Dreamcast. Or GameCube



Or Neo-Geo. Actually, these are much better than the real thing, no sharp corners or hard edges, you see



Edge can't help feeling that a real PC Engine might not take kindly to the washing machine. Unlike this one

01 Live the fantasy, lads

Japan: Here's a theory, if you'll indulge **Edge** for a moment. When Ms Gainsborough shuffled off her *Final Fantasy* immortal coil, her passing didn't pass into videogame legend because of Square's complex and involving narrative, or any emotional sophistication on the part of the developer. It came down to this plaintive, imaginary cry from an archetypal adolescent gamer: "OMG OMG! Now I will never see her b00bs!" Or maybe that was just **Edge**. Whatever, all bets are off, because now there's another way to get your Aeris kicks, aside from soft-focus tribute fan-art or necrophiliac fan fiction. *Final Fantasy Memorial* is a Japanese dating game which gives players the opportunity to woo a selection of *Final Fantasy* girls, including the (presumably – although given this is the internet there are no guarantees – resurrected) darling of *VII*. It looks like it offers the same sort of experience as *Tokimeki Memorial* (hence the title, **Edge** supposes), so expect to put in countless hours of thankless toil in the pursuit of a single instant of happiness, a lot like chasing dates in real life. Or the *Final Fantasy* series, for that matter. A coincidence? More information at: http://rx.sakura.ne.jp/ ~yuhgi/ff/ffm/

02 Software

US: This month's entry in arts and crafts corner comes not from **Edge** regular Neeklamy (who, incidentally, had his fourth piece of work appear, uncredited, in the front-end of **Edge** last month. See if *you* can find it, pointless activity fans) but from another plushphiliac gamer. Zumi makes soft toy models of consoles, and her webpage at http://nfg.2y.net/zumi/ shows off her work so far. The cuddly PC-Engine and Neo Geo will fulfil the dreams of any otaku who's ever wanted to take a console to bed with them, and the spice GameCube is even cuter than the real thing. **Edge**'s favourite, though, is the Dreamcast. Finally, Sega fans can genuinely say they've got the console hardware business completely stitched up. Although maybe that's only because Zumi hasn't got round to making a Sew-ny PlayStation yet. Sorry.

Soundbytes

"Her arm muscles went completely quiet… she controlled the robot arm using only her brain and visual feedback"
Dr Miguel Nicolelis describes the moment a monkey learned to control a videogame joystick with a robot arm using only its brain

"Videogames are a huge part of our society. Almost everyone I know either owns a console or has regular access to one. Almost every neighbourhood in Baghdad has what you might call a 'videogame cafe' with several consoles where people can play for about a dollar an hour"
Iraqi web blogger **Zeyad** reveals the difference between Them and Us

"Our nation is now swarming with thousands of mini-Manchurian Candidates ready, willing, and able to act out the violence that they have been taught is fun and consequence-free"
www.stopkill.com, a website that encourages people to contact anti-videogame lawyer Jack Thompson, gives a balanced overview of the effects of videogames

Office essentials

Japan: Look at him, there, over in accounts. Yeah, that one, with the greasy side-parting, awkward spectacles, absent moustache; the one normally holding that stern, knowing expression as he scans entry after entry in **Edge**'s expenses claims on his spreadsheet. Ooh, **Edge** loathes him so, but why has his grimace turned to into something approaching a manic grin, and why is he staring at his monitor with wild-fire passion? Oh God, perhaps he's tracked down the true nature of that receipt **Edge** just labelled 'misc. exp.' Or maybe he's just using Excel to play Nobuya Chikada's latest creation, a fully functional version of *Pac-Man* that plays on Microsoft's spreadsheet package. *PaCelMan* is a work of folly, but marvellous nonetheless, and **Edge** recommends you visit www.geocities.jp/nchikada/pac/ to appreciate it. While you're there, have a look at *Cetris* and *Celvader*, whose purpose is nominally implied and are equally, brilliantly, pointless. Who says cell shading's passé?

Mind mods

Canada: If **Edge** had known there was such a thing as a Laboratory of Cyberpsychology it's unlikely it'd be here today, instead training to be an eight-person blend of 'Cracker' and 'Robocop'. Fortunately, life isn't always exactly as **Edge** imagines, and the lab at the University of Quebec has little to do with cybernetic sleuthing and more to do with finding new-tech treatments for old-style problems. Like the use of virtual environments to treat phobias, for example, and more pertinently for the adaptation of games to replace expensive high-end simulation hardware. Agorophobics and claustrophobics can head to the University's website to download a series of environments for *Unreal Tournament* which place them in a variety of (alternately) terrifying and comfortable situations. And arachnophobics have a wealth of options too – a virtual environment for *Half-Life* puts them in a living room full of spiders, while one for *Max Payne* fills their kitchen with the beastly creatures. Download the horror at www.uqo.ca/cyberpsy/index-en.html

She's a doll

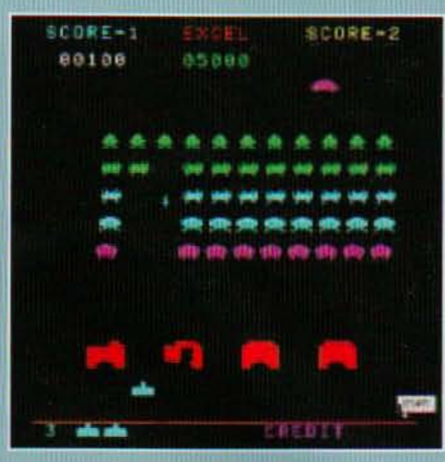
Japan: A company called High Dream Corporation has realised **Edge**'s long-standing street-fighting dreams with its new collection of *Capcom vs SNK 2* dolls. Series one of the figures comprises 30cm models of Ryu, Iori, Ken and Terry, each of which has 25 points of articulation, allowing immature sculptors like **Edge** to place them in all kinds of compromising situations. Models planned for the future include Chun-Li, Akuma, Goose, and Morrigan. See the full catalogue at www.high-dream.com

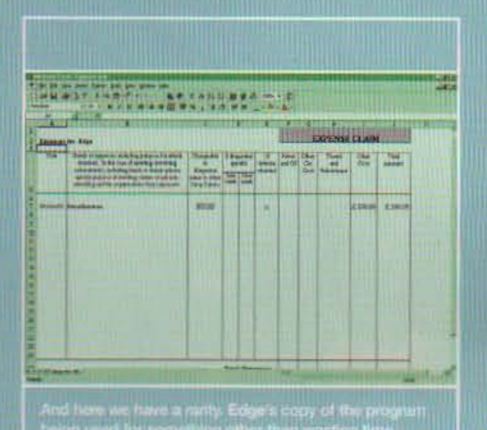
Data Stream It's been a long time, baby...

Number of games previewed in **E**131: **17**
Average estimated wait until release: **4 months, 1 day**
Total estimated wait: **5 years, 8 months, 17 days**
Number of games previewed in **E**31: **8**
Number of games previewed in **E**31 never released: **1**
Average actual wait until release: **3 months**
Total actual wait: **1 year 9 months**
Elapsed time since first *Galleon* preview: **5 years 3 months**



Forget adding up and income tax, Excel was clearly designed for playing games on. No, really. It was





And here we have a rarity. Edge's copy of the program being used for something other than wasting time



AAAAAGH, SPIDERS! It's unknown whether this clever mod allows the well known 'stamp attack.' Or grenades



A view Edge has seen many times, this. Edge Towers is many storeys high and sometimes it all gets too much



Come and 'ave a go if you think you're 'ard enough. 'Ard enough to take on a foot-high doll, are ya?

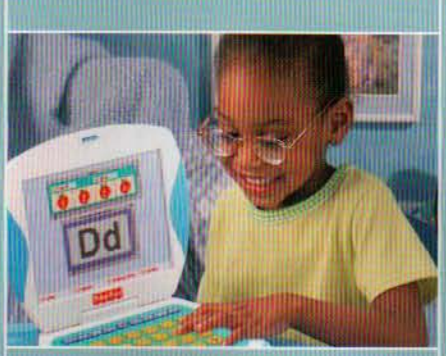




06



Dear Santa: this year **Edge** would like a Leapster so it can learn to spell, count and not use Excel for games



...and hopefully look like it's having this much fun. Look at that grin! Not actually looking at the screen, is she?



The Leapfrog website, where you can educate yourself about the company's whole range of educational games

07



When looking at this picture, it is important to remember Edge won the real karting event, and came third here



Little did the DJ know he was about to be flattened by Bowser and his mighty kart. Edge averted its eyes



Did Edge mention it won the karting? No? Really? Well it did, and has the golden wrench to prove it

08



Clash of worldviews? That'll be a fight between rival cartographic factions, then? Look out for the review



Jesus Christ that's a big gun! The distorting properties of perspective on the AK-47 are clear for all to see here

06 Engage your brain

US: Then again, if it's real edutainment you're after, LeapFrog Enterprises may have the answer. Its Leapster device is a handheld 'alternative' to the Game Boy Advance, which comes with educational software rather than games. A smart move, pandering to parents whose real dream is to live in a future where they can leave the tricky, icky, business of raising children to robots. Still, **Edge** can see some broken hearts on Christmas mornings when kids who've been promised a handheld gaming device tear off the wrapping paper to reveal *that*. Still, could be worse – it could be a mobile phone as well. More info at www.leapfrog.com

07 Doubles all round

UK: October 30, Nintendo's launch party for *Mario Kart: Double Dash!!*, and **Edge** trekked across to London's Mile End for an afternoon of real racing, followed by an evening of the fake stuff. It turns out that, despite everything we've ever been taught by the company's so-called 'simulations', it's actually illegal to throw shells at your opponents, and banana skins have very little effect on people behind you – but that didn't matter to **Edge**, the magazine rocketing to victory and receiving a golden (well, wooden, but *painted* gold) wrench trophy, a rather generous single seater track day voucher and some nice champagne for its Herculean efforts. Later on it would score a creditable third in the 32player *Double Dash!!* tournament, winning *another* wrench and some *more* champagne, as well as a load of Mario memorabilia. But it's the taking part that counts, right? Right? Right.

08 Just to compound things...

US: C-Level is an LA art/media collective based in LA, but it's its current exhibition at New York's The Kitchen gallery that attracted **Edge**'s attention. *Tekken Torture Tournament* swaps PS2 rumbles for bracing electric shocks, converting on-screen damage into actual pain. *Waco Resurrection* is the first in a planned series of games exploring alternative utopias and apocalyptic moments, and casts the player as a resurrected David Koresh. Apparently, it "re-examines the clash of worldviews inherent in the 1993 conflict," which is not really evident in the screenshot of Koresh holding a really big gun.

Continue

Science
Monkeys can play games with their brains! Brilliant!
Karting
It's like walking, only faster, and more rewarding
Linux
It's much easier to work when there aren't any games to distract you

Quit

Quitting smoking
Surely quitting quitting is worth double the points?
Broken PCs
And dodgy component vendors in London can go away, too
Giant robots
Relax. Just kidding



09 Quicksilver

Maybe it's a question of experience, maybe the desire to create 'proper literature,' but Neal Stephenson's writing career has followed two distinct trends – his books are getting longer and becoming more historical. But from the metaverse of 'Snow Crash' to future-mock Victorian in 'The Diamond Age' and the WWII-based 'Cryptonomicon', 'Quicksilver' marks his defining moment to date. Not only more than 900 pages long and set between the beheading of Charles I and the invasion of William of Orange, ominously it's also the first volume of his Baroque Cycle of books. Both the second and third tomes are due in 2004, and there's certainly something introductory about it. Split into a triumvirate itself, 'Quicksilver' follows the interwined paths of three distinct fictional characters, who interact with some of the giants of the age. Isaac Newton, Leibniz, Samuel Pepys and Robert Hooke feature, as do a goody chunk of European nobility. The crux of the tale is the underlying change triggered in society as Newton inadvertently converts alchemy into natural philosophy.

By unravelling the movement of the heavenly bodies for the common man, so Stephenson suggests, he somehow forces the star of absolute monarchy into retrograde. This makes 'Quicksilver' out to be just a patsy for Stephenson's powers of research and interest in the history of science. Of course, in part it is, but it contains what could be referred to as a ripping good yarn as well. The question is whether the fictional tales of derring-do will stretch to another 1,800 pages?

10 Pixel World

Regular readers of videogame magazines will be familiar with the pixel art style. From lavish full-page blow-ups of videogame icons to original illustrations, the aesthetic is a cosy and pungent reminder of our past. Over the last year or so, however, it has broken out into the mainstream. Give it a few more months and the ICA will probably have an exhibition.

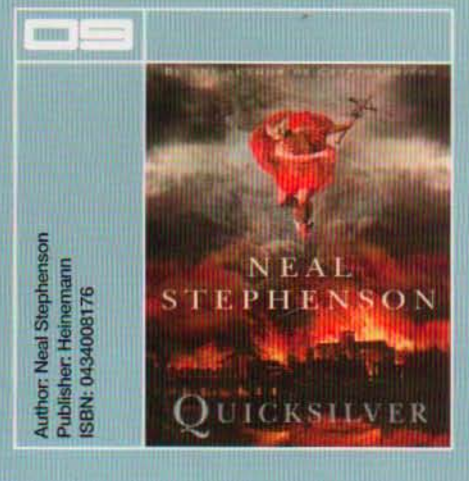
This is a collection of art from exponents of the pixel style from around the world. But it's not always a collection of the best pixel art, as unfortunately there's the occasional lazy cityscape or house interior. And when they don't even contain a kind of Richard Scarry charm and bustle they feel flat and cliched. Or perhaps that's just because **Edge** has seen their kind so many times before.

These blemish an otherwise captivating book. The images that successfully transform the ordinary into something bizarre, something beautiful are hypnotic and there's plenty of experimental work here to inspire and fall in love with. "Everything in this world can give me inspiration to do pixel illustration," states one of the artists, **Kim**. "I wish I can turn everything I see I love to pixel graphic. The world we are living now is my ideal pixel world." Indeed.

The package also contains an excellent CD-ROM containing more than 380 pixel icons and illustrations.

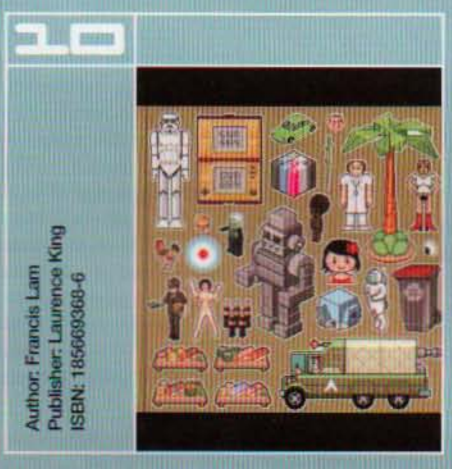
09

Author: Neal Stephenson
Publisher: Heinemann
ISBN: 0434008176



10

Author: Francis Lam
Publisher: Laurence King
ISBN: 185669368-6



11



Site: **MobyGames**
URL: **www.mobygames.com**

11 Website of the month

MobyGames' mission statement: "To meticulously catalog all relevant information about electronic games on a game-by-game basis, and then offer up that information through flexible queries and data mining. In layman's terms, it's a huge game database." A simple idea, but increasingly comprehensive. Users also have the opportunity to score and comment on the games. The highest rated game amongst its users is *The Secret of Monkey Island*, and the worst is Activision's *Atari 2600 Collection*. It's the closest videogaming has to the Internet Movie Database (www.imdb.com), and used in conjunction with the arcade-centric Killer List of Videogames (www.klov.com) it's an incredibly useful resource.

12 Advertainment

Japan: *Mario Kart: Double Dash!!* (see p98) slides into its marketing campaign displaying typical Nintendo vibrancy.



Remember the mushroom sound in *Mario* games? Well, it's playing as a man jumps out of the 'M' logo



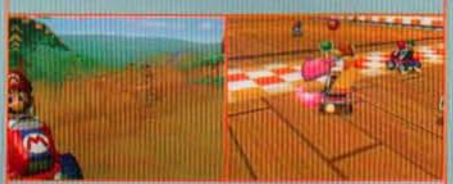
Voiceover: "This time, *Mario Kart* is about duo play!"



"The character in front can now switch places with the one behind it!"



"Good timing ensures victory!"



"With the ultimate item you can get rid of your adversaries!"



"*Mario Kart: Double Dash!!*"



Remember the sound of Mario increasing in size? So you'll know how this bit sounds, then.

On endings:
Some say the world will end in fire;
Some say in ice.
From what I've tasted of desire
I hold with those who favor fire.
But if it had to perish twice,
I think I know enough of hate
To know that for destruction ice
Is also great
And would suffice.

Fire and Ice – Robert Frost

He misses the train by seconds. Today feels like the end of the world. As he catches his breath, RedEye isn't sure he's ever seen a day like it – isn't sure there'll be another day to compare it to. Stood on a station platform, looking up, he tries to take it all in. The sky, which apocalyptic visions would have boiling over with tumultuous black clouds, is bright blue, crystal clear. The air is ice cold, perfectly still. The trees, whose colour is as bright as the sky, are just as static, a perfect photograph. Is that the point? That this is a snapshot? It's quiet. There is no-one around, not a soul. The empty train glides off silently, rocking gently on the rusting track.

RedEye's gaze follows it as it disappears into the distance, past a rundown junction which splits towards a broken tunnel. That's where The Doctor lives. Remember that?

Eighteen months ago, or whatever, when RedEye emerged from a dark period – from what looked like the end – on some perspicacious advice from an old friend: "Just go and play, because videogames are brilliant, aren't they? After all the bitching and biting, the wars, the scores and the PR whores, they're just really really good." That's all it took.

"I thought you were drunk when you wrote that," said RedEye's commissioning editor.

No, not drunk, and more sober than ever right now. Everything is defined, as if traced in outline with a thin black marker pen. RedEye sits down on a red iron bench. He flinches – it feels as cold as the air, colder. The time on the station's digital clock reads 00:00:00. It tries to flick a second on, but jerks and resets. The dot matrix announcements board blinks a Möbius strip on and off. There should be training for this sort of thing. We've fought the end of the world so many times in videogames, but have we actually been there? Would we recognise it?

RedEye guesses not. See, videogames mostly don't have failure built in. In these pre-apocalyptic tests we are challenged to save humanity and all of its creations from impending disaster, be it supernatural, man-made or organic. We are one person – or one person and a party of five – against all the odds, and our chances of success are a million-to-one. Yet we always make it, because success is hardwired and there's no code for failure. The world cannot end, because it just isn't possible.

And that frustrates the thrill of winning, because, hell, what's the point when we've got such a safety net. The end of the world that's alluded to throughout *Final Fantasy* games is nothing so much as an empty threat. It is the biggest threat in the game, but it never happens! It's never going to happen! It actually, physically, cannot happen.

How can we be afraid of something that's impossible? We beat the game because there is nothing else to do, not because we have to.

There is nowhere else to go.

(Still no train, no movement. A piece of rubbish doesn't tumble by. A bird doesn't cry out, a tannoy doesn't crackle a facile apology. The end is defined by absence.)

Final Fantasy got lucky, thinks RedEye, as he watches the pavement for bugs (there are none). Excluding the Square fetishists, if you ask anyone to name one stand-out moment from the *Final Fantasy* series they'll tell you about the end of Aeris. Ask for two, and they'll struggle. It removed the safety net for a moment, then put it straight back again. But it did enough to overpower most who played it, perhaps indicative of how formulaic so many adventures really are. The most painful losses are those that come completely out of the blue, losses that don't give you a chance to do things properly. Those losses that are out of your hands, motivated by bastards or God, or both. All you can do is remember what you had…

There won't be a *Rez 2*. Sega has no interest in making one, being as the first one was such a dreadful commercial failure. It's a short-termist view, because influence doesn't necessarily relate directly to sales, and a company's reputation and future isn't built entirely on whoring itself to every consumer. If the games industry insists on catering to the same market with everything it offers, then the market will never grow. Besides, Mizuguchi is a game consultant now, and without him it's doubtful they have the peculiar internal drive required to push through something so smart.

But, anyway, why would we want one? *Rez* was perfect. It ended, and it's over. That's it. Brilliance has to be finite, or eventually it becomes simply mundane.



REDEYE

A sideways look at the videogame industry

The train now at platform five stops at Armageddon

RedEye opens his bag, and pulls out **Edge**. Inside the thick orange cover, which sees Sonic unceremoniously replaced as the face of a new Sega, Nagoshi laments his company's lack of hardware. Another thing that ended before we were ready. We've heard that before from a million Sega kids who can't let go, soon we'll hear it again from Nintendo followers.

"If the games industry insists on catering to the same market with everything it offers, then the market will never grow"

And when the GameCube is over, hundreds will mourn its passing and say that the videogame world is over, but it isn't, it won't be, it never will. It's just over for them. They'll sit on the platform, waiting for a train that never comes, because they've been left behind.

It is over for them. What's left? The lava levels and the slippy-slidey ice worlds. RedEye stares at the tracks. Nothing is coming. He looks at the clock, and waits for it to start up again.

RedEye is a veteran videogame journalist. His views do not necessarily coincide with ***Edge****'s*

So there I was, smouldering pipe clenched implacably between gritted teeth, battering away at Wario's final set of games until finally I beat the hilarious and brilliant boss level to win.

Then I could relax a bit. Of course, the game isn't really complete, but that dastardly Thrilling level is clearly designed for organisms such as Bishop in 'Aliens' (he of the knife-between-your-fingers trick) rather than mere humans such as myself.

No doubt most people perusing this column will already have *Wario Ware* and know its tremendous postmodern delights, but if anyone doesn't I would just like to suggest that you put down this magazine right now and go and buy it, along with a GBA if you don't own one, since it's the most wondrously grin-your-face-off game I've played in years.

Part of the magic of *Wario Ware*, naturally, is its immense variety. It is hard to get bored with a selection of hundreds of beautifully surreal three-second wonders. It was the glorious variety of *Wario Ware* that set me wondering about the proper role of variety in games in general. Maybe we should try to distinguish between different forms of it. You could call them extrinsic and intrinsic.

Take *Jak II*, a modern cartoon-styled exploration game of immense polish and huge variety. The gameplay extends from old-skool side-on platforming with a few swooping camera tricks through modern 3D platforming, thirdperson shoot 'em up, hovercar racing game and more besides.

Much as I could appreciate the craftsmanship and wit that went into making the game, it left me rather cold. And that may be partially explained by the fact that its variety is of the extrinsic flavour, which in this context means that there is no convincing reason why all these different game styles need to have come together in one box. The plot is expected to do all the work in this respect, but relying on narrative alone to provide such important glue is risky. I quickly became resentful, for example, that I had to negotiate the appallingly slow traffic of the beautifully rendered but frustratingly tight passageways of the hub city in order to get to the passages of platforming that constitute the heart of the game. *Jak II* is a game of immense extrinsic variety which lacks one strong central idea.

If, on the other hand, you have a strong central idea, and play variations on it so as to give the player something constantly evolving and new, then this might be called intrinsic variety. This is one notable difference between *Jak II* and a game that clearly provided its structural model – *GTAIII*. The strong central idea of *GTAIII* and *Vice City* is: 'Here's a city. It's big and it's living. You can do what the hell you like in it'. The endless sub-variations on driving and shooting missions come under the umbrella of this one ruling concept, and so the variety is intrinsic, an organic part of the videogame universe.

The setting of qualified realism, meanwhile, ensures that the developers can't write in a bizarre sci-fi plot twist just to squeeze in a 3D space-dogfighting minigame, because that would represent an intrusion of extrinsic variety.

It seems to be a modern canard of game development that audiences really want a lot of different, unrelated game styles under one roof, because somehow that constitutes refreshing variety or value for money. Hence, for instance, the sorry history of James Bond-licensed games that combine shooting, driving, boating and for all I know roller-skating to depressingly mediocre effect. But really great games are always based around a single strong idea, within which there is room for intrinsic variety. *Metal Gear Solid*'s *Pac-Man*-with-soldiers concept rules the game's structure, allowing exemplary intrinsic variety in the different uses of gadgets and weapons. *Ico*'s cooperative exploration model allows intrinsic variety in its spatial puzzles, and also simply in the manifold gorgeous areas of the castle – in fact, one might even argue that the combat against the shadow monsters dilutes the game's beauty precisely because it is a kind of extrinsic variety: is it really necessary that there should be fighting in such a game?

Ocarina of Time, meanwhile, is famous in part for the dazzling variety of its minigames, but they are all rooted intrinsically in the game's world and sprout organically from its bewitching fiction. None of them seem out of place or bolted on.

If, then, you have a great game concept, you don't need another four concepts to make a great game. One suffices. And so one is instantly suspicious of a product that yokes together fundamentally different game styles. It is almost a clue to the absence of a strong concept in the first place. Strong game ideas are expensive, creatively. Not everyone has them and the temptation to reuse the good ones explains sequelitis.

If you don't have a strong concept it is naturally tempting to try to replace quality with quantity, and that's where the unsatisfactory paradigm of extrinsic variety rears its head. But one strong concept, well executed, is always enough – for instance in the wonderful *Viewtiful Joe*, whose intrinsic variety of ever-deepening combo moves combined with its fascinating aesthetic of filmed Japanese draftsmanship makes it one of the strongest game 'personalities', stylistically speaking, since *Jet Grind Radio* first appeared. *Viewtiful Joe* is instantly compelling, unrelenting and eye-poppingly beautiful entertainment of a sort that the diffuse and vaguely disconnected pleasures of *Jak II* cannot match. Readers who still remember the beginning of this column will naturally be wondering how I propose to square this argument with my love of *Wario Ware*, which at first sight seems to be a riot of nothing but extrinsic variety. In truth I consider *Wario Ware*, as befits a ludically historicist game that plays so cleverly and knowledgably with the evolution of the videogame form, to be among other things a comment on precisely this phenomenon.

Wario Ware is a game whose single strong concept is the tension between the thrill of variety and the comfort of familiarity. Every perfectly conceived challenge within plays out the drama of surprise, learning and skill acquisition that is the psychological story of how we get to grips with a game in the first place. That is the concept informing every *Wario Ware* minigame: its dizzying variety of execution is revealed to share this one deep purpose, and so it is joyously intrinsic variety par excellance. Now, maybe I can beat Thrilling after all...



TRIGGER HAPPY

Steven Poole

Gun-toting pipe-smoker takes on Wario Ware

"Strong game ideas are expensive, creatively. Not everyone has them and the temptation to reuse the good ones explains sequelitis"

Steven Poole is the author of 'Trigger Happy: The Inner Life of Videogames' (Fourth Estate). Email: steven_poole@mac.com

As I write this, a localised version of *Grand Theft Auto III* is very close to receiving its release in Japan, published by Capcom. Everyone in this country who cares about games, and that includes myself, knows how the game has already become a fabulous phenomenon overseas, but here the hype is only just beginning to build up.

Since the game has sold tons of copies in the west, the dedicated gamers over here are desperate to know how the title is going to perform in the Japanese market.

As a dedicated gamer, and someone who has an obvious interest in gaming sales figures, I'm getting rather excited about it. I have also discussed it with my friends and colleagues, and their opinions vary wildly.

"I think we can expect the game to sell around 25 per cent of what it sold in America," said one.





AV OUT

Toshihiro Nagoshi, general manager, Sega Creative Center division

The importance of *Grand Theft Auto III* to Japan

"It should sell, oh, maybe 400,000 or 500,000 copies," said another.

Then there are the somewhat less enthusiastic views, like this: "No, no, no. This is clearly a western thing! The game's high popularity will remain mostly overseas. I think we are looking at sales anywhere up to 10 per cent of the US, around 200,000 copies, maximum."

What is my view? Well, you might not concur, but I believe I agree with the latter opinion. I'm a little bit more pessimistic than that, even. I think it will perform quite badly, perhaps selling fewer than 200,000 copies.

Why? Well, the reasons are quite simple.

The first factor is the poor timing. The fact the Japanese release misses the zenith of US sales is a huge mistake. Releasing it at the same time, or at least a little closer to the US date, would have caused a worldwide commotion and made the game sell twice as well.

Even though the game hasn't been released here yet, it still feels 'old' to the hardcore gamers.

The second factor is how the title has been promoted. In Japan, the game's concept of violence, which has been so key to its appeal in the west, has been put to one side.

Instead, magazine previews are focussing on the freedom available, which is clearly a huge part of what keeps people playing. I am not sure this is what gets them to buy the game in the first place, as freedom is quite a 'floaty' concept to grasp.

So when people are told by the media to buy *GTAIII* because it offers them massive freedom, I believe this will have a negative impact, not the positive one it should have. "What kind of game is that?" they will ask. It will be hard for them to understand the idea behind it.

Sad as it may seem, violence sells. In this business you have to do everything you can to sell your game, and this is why I find it very, very strange that this incredibly violent game is being promoted without any reference to its violence at all, or at least with any mention of the killings and beatings severely limited.

That is odd, don't you agree?

I can see what you're thinking. I know there's a moral issue here – maybe that's what pushed them towards promoting the freedom over the blood and guns, and I'm sure they had a huge dilemma and debate over this.

I think bringing this game to Japan is a challenge, but sometimes questions of morality are outweighed by having the chance to bring something worthwhile to people's attention, and I believe this is one of those occasions.

Capcom have the chance to deliver a great game to Japan, and I feel a little sad about this as it looks like very few people will get a chance to appreciate the freedom of the game because they don't understand what they're being sold.

Don't misunderstand me, I think it's great the game is being published here in the first place, but I believe it's a missed opportunity.

As a mature and developed nation we should not shy away from the age ratings put on the boxes, and we should promote the game as a dangerous item. It would put some people off, but I also think the interest it would generate would have a dramatic impact on sales.

We should also not be too frightened of those who oppose videogames, and try to sanitise something they don't understand. We need to be responsible and build a culture around *GTAIII*-style games that makes it acceptable for adults, and adults alone, to go out and buy them.

Otherwise we are simply fooling ourselves.

You see, not selling *GTA* as a violent game is like selling an adult video in a toy shop. Maybe some of you will remember what I wrote a few months ago about *Grand Theft Auto*'s principles. I find this game, and others like it, frightening because of what they represent. However, this particular game is very enjoyable to play, and entertainment has to be the most important thing when it comes to our industry.

GTAIII did more for games in the west than any other recent game – it made the market even wider and more diverse. It is very violent, but this attracted a certain type of person to games, and the hype surrounding the violence attracted even more. It revealed to a new market the true potential of games. I know I'm not alone in this view, as when I talk to other designers at Sega they tell me how it affected their perceptions of games and what games can be.

Titles with such impact are precious, they are few and far between, and it's very important we make the most of them while we can. What is important now is what we do next. We have to explicitly think of how to develop this kind of game in the future – not the violent aspects, but the freedom and the gameplay. This may not be the selling point, but it's where the true genius lies.

"Titles with such impact are precious, they are few and far between, and it's very important we make the most of them while we can"

With a more closely defined view of what we could do with this new trend in games we can develop it to give sharper focus to the titles that will, inevitably, follow in *Grand Theft Auto*'s blood-stained footprints.

That's why I want it to sell lots, but that's also why I fear so much that it won't.

Am I right or wrong? We'll see.

Prior to Sega's recent restructuring, Toshihiro Nagoshi was president of Amusement Vision

KA-BANG!!!!!!!

Sorry, did that scare you? It did?! Then you should see a doctor: it was just a word, written on a page, and if your brain is interpreting it as a loud sound you really ought to get help. Who knows where such mental problems might lead? One day you may be reading an ornithological textbook and suddenly believe you're being attacked by swallows.

Or drakes.

Nevertheless, in the world of entertainment it's always preferable to start and often (unless you're Kurt Cobain) end things with a bang, or at the very least a rumble that builds to a coruscating roar before fading away to a moment of relative calm prior to spiking intermittently towards a thunderous climax, offset by a tranquil coda. It's a tease – a seductive glimpse of a pyrotechnic stocking, keeping your attention-buttocks gripped to the seat for the duration of whatever-it-is to come. In a narrative-led videogame particularly such a tease – the James Bond pre-credits sequence, if you will – is not just advisable, it's an absolute must.

Take Sony's *Primal*. They can call it 'art' until their teeth fall out, but it boasts some of the most abysmal pacing ever seen in a game. Following some polished – if ultimately redundant – opening cut-scenes (themselves getting proceedings started by taking control out of the player's hands) we're treated to half an hour of following that irritating little demon guy around some achingly bland and hackneyed locations, during which absolutely nothing happens. You don't encounter any other living thing for almost 15 minutes.

To the best of my knowledge, games aren't books. Nevertheless, developers could learn a lesson or two from the words of best-selling author Elmore Leonard, whoever the hell he is. With regard to writing, the sage Leonard recommends simply: "cutting out everything, but the good parts". At first this appears to be one of those pieces of advice that are so obvious as to be worthless, and in isolation it could even be the words of a psychotic serial killer, advising exactly how to eviscerate a corpse. But I digress...

There's an increasing trend for developers to artificially extend the lifespan of games with needless padding. Not the sort of padding we got in the early- to mid-'90s, where everything was FMV sequences, and photographs of cats sprawled across griddles, but the sort of padding where you're expected to believe you're playing the game when in actual fact all you're doing is wandering from one event to the next. What's the better game: *Sonic Adventure* with its moping around town, or Mega Drive *Sonic The Hedgehog* with its relentless pace and action?

Cliched as it is, in almost exactly the same way nobody sets out to be bitten by a duck, or to get dragged into a bush by a grunting, half-naked tramp, nobody sets out to make a bad game. Oh, for sure, it's apparent some companies will instigate the creation of games just to shift the maximum number of units with the minimum of time, energy and money spent. And we all know who we're talking about.

But in my experience, on a shop floor level, game developers are by and large a decent and sincere bunch who try to do their best with the resources at hand. That said, it's frustrating to read interviews in which developers talk about games becoming more like movies, and that they're increasingly applying Hollywood techniques to game creation. This, frankly, is deluded guff. How many of these developers have actually studied film-making, or even bothered to read Robert McKee's 'Story' – the impenetrable screenwriting bible? Nine times out of ten, games pay mere lip service to the ideal of the summer blockbuster, without actually looking at the fundamentals of movie-making. Putting the details of story aside for the minute – it's a whole separate debate – any screen narrative will collapse without a proper structure – and of late I've found myself becoming increasingly apathetic and bored by games featuring lazy structure and swathes of nothing to do.

People seem to be in unanimous agreement that Knights of the Old Republic is the best 'Star Wars' game in years. And it is (although that's a bit like saying 'Attack of the Clones' is the best film since 'Return of the Jedi').

The set-pieces, the fights, even the swoop racing are indeed all highly enjoyable, but before you get to them you have to spend far, far, far too long wandering along identikit corridors, or across the Dune Sea, or through the forests of Kashyyyk.

Yeah, there's the occasional random encounter to break up the tedium, but there's no escaping the uneasy feeling you're merely going through the motions, and being fooled into thinking you're getting your money's worth. *The Wind Waker* was another culprit, with an obscene amount of time spent getting from one place to another. And don't even get me started on the back-tracking in *Metroid Prime*.

Well, alright, do. It sucked.

For reasons we shan't go into, I watched a few consecutive episodes of 'Doctor Who' recently. It reminded me of *Metroid Prime*, with its repeated use of locations. In 'Doctor Who's case it was a budget issue – they couldn't afford more than a handful of eggboxes for sets. With *Metroid Prime*, who knows why we have to keep revisiting the same locations?

Admittedly, the whole exploratory element of *Metroid Prime* is part of the concept, but it continually drags you back and the world ends up feeling small.

For those of you who don't know, my day job is officially described as 'copper's nark'. However, I have another job: screenwriting. Recently, I wrote an episode of a kids series for ITV. Even on a show that is ostensibly aimed a younger audience, structure is all.

Right up until the final draft there was a scene that everyone – myself, script editor, producer, executive producer – decreed to be the funniest and best-written scene in the script. The only problem was it had barely anything to do with any of the storylines. I found myself in the uncommon position of arguing for the scene to be taken out, and so eventually we did. Suddenly – and without knowing exactly why – the script as a whole just lifted and took off.

Not literally, that would be absurd.

If more developers applied the same principles to their games – taking out the elements that aren't strictly necessary to the game experience – the games would hopefully fly, and become more dynamic. If the game can survive without it, drop it. Don't start a journey without a map. Brush after every meal. Etc.

Games aren't books, and they're not films, but like both they require tight editing. Less isn't always more, but 'less crap bits where nothing happens' certainly is.

And with that, I bid you... BOOM!!!!



BIFFOVISION

Page 28, press hold, and reveal. 'Digitiser's founder speaks out

Games are not books or films. Discuss

"What's the better game: *Sonic Adventure* with its moping around town, or Mega Drive *Sonic The Hedgehog* with its relentless pace and action?"

Mr Biffo is a semi-retired videogame journalist. His views do not necessarily coincide with ***Edge's***

prescreen

Incoming electronic entertainment from across the globe

Edge's most wanted

Karaoke Stage

Though 'Mandy', 'I Think We're Alone Now' and 'Only You' are unlikely to appear on the playlist, **Edge** is gurgling in anticipation for an office singing marathon.



(PlayStation2) Konami

Mario and Luigi: Superstar Saga

The happiest-looking Mario on the GBA? **Edge** couldn't be happier that someone has stolen the Princess's voice and replaced it with explosions.



(Game Boy Advance) Nintendo

Forbidden Siren

Despite the lame name change and some lumpy-looking combat, **Edge** can't control the curiosity or the goosepimples this game provokes.



(PlayStation2) SCEI

Castlevania: Lament of Innocence

Please Lord, let this be better than the N64 version. From what **Edge** has played this is going to be a whip-crackingly good return to form for Konami.



(PlayStation2) Konami

Are games to blame for violent attacks?

Edge suggests we let the US army decide

In September, two young boys claimed a videogame was their inspiration for murder. The gravity of the accusations made is such that it inspired extreme reactions on both sides of this age-old argument.

The prosecution's lawyer, **Jack Thompson**, refers on his website (www.stopkill.com) to videogames as addictive "murder simulators", resulting in an America "swarming with thousands of mini-Manchurian Candidates ready, willing, and able to act out the violence that they have been taught is fun and consequence-free." It's the kind of hysteria that made gamers stonewall the subject. It's guns that kill, not games.

Enter *Full Spectrum Warrior*, interesting in that it proves both camps right. It shows that the US army, which has had a significant involvement with computer training simulations over the last 20 years, has no doubt that there is absolutely no real-world training value in firing a gun in a videogame. Games are officially useless as 'murder trainers', but it is so convinced of a videogame's ability to shape a player's thought processes that it is providing Xboxes in soldiers' barracks. Tactical classes will consist of soldiers bringing in their save games as homework. It is trusting this game, in part, to save men's lives in battle.

What is significant is that the army rejected other proposals for the game that relied on map and icon based abstractions. It felt it crucial to the training value of the software for it to communicate the emotional and visceral reality of being under fire. It believes that playing the game can help to ensure their soldiers choose one path of action instead of another, to reinforce one kind of behaviour over other, more instinctive responses.

Jack Thompson would call that process 'conditioning', and **Edge** thinks he might be right. It remembers, once, letting a whole plate of sausage and mash go cold because it had become convinced the gravy lakes and carrot shales were a level of *Pikmin*. It's a trivial example, but one that means **Edge** is in no position to be dismissive of the power of games to impose their own shape over your thoughts. As long as we let Jack Thompson set the tone of the debate on game violence we lose the opportunity to consider the unique potential of games to mesh into our minds – a potential whose violent implications must not be considered in isolation from the constructive, extraordinary fascinations it can create.















Jade Empire

Over the years, BioWare has established a reputation for quality. **Edge**'s own reputation for quality didn't stop its tape recorder from failing to record its interview, but here's the lowdown on the company's latest



Different combat styles include a barstool, improvisational technique, as well as the ability to transform into a nature spirit. BioWare is hoping this will lead to similar levels of depth and replayability to *KotOR*



Having established its reputation with a couple of big name licences, BioWare has become a brand in its own right – one that is synonymous with quality. With the *Baldur's Gate* series and *Neverwinter Nights* ('Dungeons & Dragons'), and *Knights of the Old Republic* (Star Wars), the Canadian developer has demonstrated an unerring knack for producing some of the finest roleplaying titles ever, featuring unfolding narratives and epic challenges, moral choices and intriguing subplots, colourful side characters and breathtakingly detailed worlds.



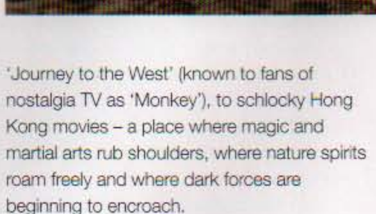
"A place where magic and martial arts rub shoulders, where nature spirits roam freely and where dark forces are beginning to encroach"



Dialogue choices offer solutions to problems, but are also loaded with moral implications that determine the game's eventual outcome

Now though, it's time for the company to strike out on its own.

Each of those design traits are set to return in a game that has apparently been quietly gestating ever since doctors Greg Zeschuk and Ray Muzyka turned their backs on medicine to the lasting gratitude of the videogame industry. *Jade Empire* looks set to extend the company's design excellence to an original setting based on Chinese myth. The eponymous empire is based on sources ranging widely from classic literature such as



'Journey to the West' (known to fans of nostalgia TV as 'Monkey'), to schlocky Hong Kong movies – a place where magic and martial arts rub shoulders, where nature spirits roam freely and where dark forces are beginning to encroach.

The most dramatic departure from BioWare's previous work is that the game will be based on a wholly original ruleset. Most of the company's previous titles have been based on the Wizards of the Coast d20 rules, a system that's been honed over 30 years of development. *Jade Empire* features an underlying set of rules that have been developed in-house, based on six character attributes and a novel combat system. Each character is defined by their Mind, Focus, Spirit, Chi, Body and Health ratings. Each statistic has associated functions in the game world, such as the ability to take damage (Health, obviously), and the ability to utilise powerful magic (Chi).

Of course, the advantage of using a system such as d20 is that almost every gamer understands it – if only because it has been so widely copied. But the basics of BioWare's ruleset are already comprehensible and it certainly seems intuitive. Both Zeschuk and Muzyka are at pains to stress that, like their previous games, there will be no single best character type or style, while *KotOR*'s auto-levelling system returns to ensure progression is as painless as possible.

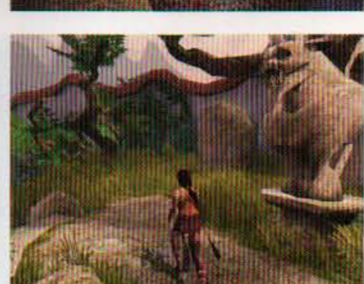
Combat also looks set to reprise

Format: **Xbox**
Publisher: **Microsoft Game Studios**
Developer: **BioWare**
Origin: **Canada**
Release: **Q3 2004 (US), TBC (UK)**









BioWare's penchant for a balance between action and strategy, allowing players to pause the action to consider their tactics. Unlike the company's previous RPGs, however, the action is based on a direct input rather than the realtime implementation of turnbased mechanics. The strategic element arises from the ability to switch between seven different fighting styles at any point during combat.

Each style belongs to one of three schools – martial arts, magic and weapon – so characters might burst into combat by invoking a powerful animal spirit then following up with a flurry of longsword blows before switching to the defensive Willow style. Each style consists of various moves, and as they progress, characters can specialise in a single style, or generalise across several. Of course, it wouldn't be a BioWare game without an equally extensive quest structure, and players will once again be able to alter the outcome of the plot based on the morality of their actions.

More interesting is a follower system, which will allow some tasks to be delegated to henchmen – though choosing the right individual for the job will be essential if you're to avoid the ill-will generated by, for instance, sending in a gung-ho warrior to settle a legal dispute. It's these sorts of intricately-layered mechanics that have granted BioWare such a fervent fanbase.

Edge must confess to being a fully paid up member itself – and is breathless with anticipation for *Jade Empire*.

Although you only control a single character directly, a follower system provides a lively supporting cast. And, although nothing is confirmed yet, there is the possibility of getting Xbox Live updates

Deus Ex: Invisible War

The game that brought a Choose Your Own Adventure element to videogames returns, and with even more possibilities...



All the biomods use battery power, so it's best to use them sparingly. **Edge** has only played the Xbox version but can attest to the technical mastery: lighting, physics and visual flair are all top notch









Cranial implants, multitools, biomods and nanotechnology. Welcome back to the *Deus Ex* universe, it's a sci-fi fanatic's dream.

While the original game did succeed in picking up a skip-load of awards it never filtered out to the wider gaming populace. Multiple routes, a variety of objectives and three endings made JC Denton's adventures special, but its complexity could be off-putting to all but the very dedicated.

Ion Storm has taken the brave decision not to water down the values that made *Deus Ex* exceptional, hoping, presumably, that a post-*GTAIII* massmarket audience would buy into it second time round.

For the record, **Edge** is overjoyed that there's always three or so methods of tackling any given problem or scenario. For the obsessive compulsives among us that means a try-everything-on-anything approach, but the rewards are always worth the effort.

The choices begin when the player elects the character's sex (the protagonist's name is Alex D – see what they did there?). Set 20 years after the first game, *Invisible War*'s backdrop is a chaotic future where factions are vying for political dominance. Conveniently this ensures there are plenty of people (and aliens) looking to take advantage of Alex D's specialised skills.

"Ion Storm promises a twisty-turny plot of the highest calibre. Even JC Denton makes an appearance to add more strands to the storyline"

Although the protagonist begins the game working for a niche anti-terrorist organisation, good and evil soon become blurred and Ion Storm promises a twisty-turny plot of the highest calibre. Even JC Denton makes an appearance to add more strands to the labyrinthine storyline.

The locales **Edge** has experienced flit between complex building interiors to encouragingly expansive outdoor city sections. These are replete with your typical cyberpunk settings: dodgy alleyways, basement dens and slums. Engaging people in conversations brings up multiple-choice answers where missions can be accepted or rejected. It's difficult to assess at this stage whether the responses will provoke as many options and subquests as BioWare's *Knights of the Old Republic*, but from the levels **Edge** has seen there are many non-goal-specific avenues to explore.

One side mission involves torching a coffee emporium, a job that will raise your notoriety and bring in the credits for upgrades and equipment. There's also a Gob-fighting pit located in Chicago's less salubrious quarter. Gobs are vicious lizard-like creatures trained to fight for the sport of humans. Gob-zillar is the outright favourite for the tournament, but it's possible to sneak into its owner's apartment and nobble the creature before its big fight. And then another money-making opportunity opens up...

An even greater number of objects can be picked up, smashed or interacted with, ensuring that every niche or alcove could conceal a potential hidey-hole. No question





A mysterious alien race called the Omar will attempt to win you over to their cause. They are heavily armed with, among other things, flame-throwers so it's best to treat them with caution and respect

Format: **Xbox, PC**
Publisher: **Eidos**
Developer: **Ion Storm**
Origin: **US**
Release: **Q1 2004**

Previously in **E**111, **E**112, **E**119, **E**125





about it, *Invisible War* will not disappoint those who played through the original several times to find all the hidden Forty cartons.

"See through walls and leap 40 feet into the air," promises the press release. Again, nanotech augmentation plays a big part in the game, only this time it's possible to buy upgrades on the black market. The downside to this is that the quality can vary significantly, and in some cases even adversely affect the user. Alex D can also choose to become proficient with any weapon in the game and there will be a heavy emphasis on RPG-style skill distribution.

The interface has been designed with the Xbox joypad in mind and is not as clunky as last year's PS2 port of *Deus Ex*. Favourite weapons and gadgets can be placed in the quick selection slots (the icons arc around the left and right sides of the display) and these can then be scrolled through with the press of a single button. The framerate has improved markedly over the last few months and character movement is much smoother. Although **Edge** didn't get into too many gun battles, the AI didn't look particularly sophisticated, and is perhaps the game's only potential weakness.

Invisible War is so important to Eidos that key members of the *Thief III* team have come on board for the final push (at the time of writing a pre-Christmas release is still expected in the US). And if Valve really does get *Half-Life 2* out in spring then PC gamers are going to have a feast come the new year.

And for Xbox owners? This is definitely something to remedy their post-*KotOR* cravings.



Weapons and gadgets fit into the slots on the left-hand side of the display, while nanotech augmentations can be seen on the right. In a wonderful conceit, the HUD is there because it has been surgically burned into Alex D's eyeballs

Firefighter F.D.18

Format: **PlayStation2**
Publisher: **Konami**
Developer: **In-house (KCEJ)**
Origin: **Japan**
Release: **March 2004**

Konami goes from Disco Inferno to Towering Inferno, but will its unusual firefighting title spread to a wide enough audience?



Burning Rangers springs to mind, but then you'd struggle to think of any other firefighting games. *Brave Fire Fighters*, of course; Sega's tremendously enjoyable arcade title, complete with hose and adjustable nozzle attachment. And, um, the firefighting microgame in *Wario Ware Inc*. Konami doesn't have a great deal of competition, then.

If you loved the graffiti-erasing mechanic in *Super Mario Sunshine* then this could appeal. Fires spring up and spread with ferocity so it's important you direct your spray to the heart of the blaze. Hit the spot and the flames will begin to diminish; mopping up the final orange licks will then open the way to survivors.

Calling them survivors is slightly presumptuous, however. You see, their lives depend on your skill and heroism. Fight the flames ineffectively and their life meters begin to diminish. Fail to reach them before the flames do and the result will be a 'game over' screen, a dismissal and an embittered life of self-recrimination.



Rescue a survivor and he will utter a short "thank you". In truth, the interaction between characters is currently flat and needs some more work

But that's for losers. Edging forward and watching as the fires quell is satisfying, and there are various tools available to tackle other situations. An axe can chop through wooden obstructions, while the Impulse IFEX gun fires a controlled burst of water into places that are hard to reach. There are medikits to collect and other extinguisher types are required to tackle different kinds of fires.

Edge has only played a one-level demo so it's difficult to assess whether Konami's firefighting hope is going to deliver enough variety to keep interest levels high. Indeed, as traditions and pay conditions differ enormously in the east it seems very unlikely that out-of-control bonfires and wildcat picketing will make the final cut.

A trailer with the demo did reveal that the blazes take on 'personalities' the further into the game you get. There's a neat side-step command that helps you avoid sudden backdrafts and prescripted events such as falling rubble and exploding cars provide the sudden jolts you'd expect from a disaster game. While the one-level demo did get a bit samey, **Edge** hopes the interesting central mechanic is eventually supported by a diverse range of scenarios.







Apparently Konami consulted with the local fire service to get an idea of how flames behave and this is reflected reasonably convincingly in the game. What's more worrying is the player's magic hose – turn around from the action and you'll notice that it's attached to nothing but a patch of ground







Gotcha Force

Format: **GameCube**
Publisher: **Capcom**
Developer: **In-house (Production Studio 1)**
Origin: **Japan**
Release: **November (Japan), February (UK)**

Previously in **E**125

It's a case of Gotcha catch 'em all with Capcom's latest GameCube oddity. A merchandising opportunity surely awaits...

Ah, Capcom. You've got to love it. There's either a Josh Baskin-style boy-in-a-man's-body MD pulling all the strings during the product meetings or the company knows something we don't.

Namely, that everyone's suddenly going to tap into its unique brand of vibrant and esoteric games. *Gotcha Force* is merely the latest in a long line of strange and charming titles developed exclusively for GameCube. It might not sell in huge numbers, but **Edge** isn't complaining.

The trick here is that you can collect over 100 'borgs', each with various special moves and abilities. Stop and imagine that for a moment. These are not just a range of similarly designed bots, some with extra fire-power or the ability to jump a bit higher, but vastly differing characters with diverse attacks. Some are humanoid, some are monsters and some robots. If Capcom can make each one feel and play uniquely then this will be something special.

Happily, the bulk of the game has been programmed for multiplayer bouts, both two- and fourplayer contests. Plug some extra controllers in and you'll realise *Gotcha Force* has been honed for friendly rivalry and mayhem.

Two-on-two deathmatch is the main component, but CPU borgs can be introduced for those of a lonely disposition.

As you might expect for a game with so many characters, the control mapping remains much the same for each. The A button boosts your charge into the air, while repeated pressing gains extra elevation; the B button launches attacks (these can be augmented by keeping it pressed down for extra explosive power).

The shoulder buttons change targets; the X button launches a special attack; the Y button triggers a power boost and the control stick performs movement and jump-dashes. In combination they provide enough complexity to keep battles clean and free of random frustrations.

It may look like realtime *Pokémon* and, well, erm, it is realtime *Pokémon*. Problems that currently exist include a camera that fails to track your borg effectively when it takes to the air and a good deal of scenery tearing.

The Story mode seems a bit dull, but then **Edge** has only sampled the early, and far too easy, levels.

If the problems can be ironed out this could well be another experimental Capcom success story.













Borgs can be traded from one memory card to another after they've been collected in Story mode, emphasising the game's multiplayer nature

At present the battling is on the frenetic side, but practice does pay dividends, especially if you learn how to jump-dash effectively. Bouts take place in small arenas so finding barriers to rest behind is key

Cool Girl

Format: **PlayStation2**
Publisher: **Konami**
Developer: **In-house (KCEJ)**
Origin: **Japan**
Release: **February 2004 (Japan), TBC (UK)**

Hack 'n' slash gameplay combined with sexy licensed characters and highly choreographed action – was there ever a surer recipe for PS2 success?



Despite a mixed reception when released two years ago, *7 Blades* has obviously given Konami a taste for highly cinematic hack 'n' slash. The company recently licensed Takara's 'Cool Girl' range of action figures (very popular in Japan and the US apparently), and is throwing them into a similarly combat-focused adventure.

Once again, gorgeous 3D visuals and masses of CG are being used to back up the action. (Indeed, *Cool Girl* comes on two DVDs, packed with over two hours of CG.)

And once again, players get a choice of two characters. Ice uses modern long- and short-range weaponry, while Aska is a more traditional ninja figure boasting slick movement, powerful jumping capabilities and a range of devastating hand-to-hand combat moves and katana techniques. She also has a wire that can be shot out to access higher areas, or to capture enemies. You may well have this one marked down as the stealth character, but *Cool Girl* is really an all-out action title, with only a few subtle nods toward *Metal Gear* and its ilk. It is important to hide from the enemy at times, and you can perform a quick 'attack-then-hide' move a la *Time Crisis*, but mostly it's running and attacking people. When this becomes tiresome, selecting the hard difficulty setting, which introduces more complex moves such as strafing, can increase the technical level.



The influence of John Woo and Quentin Tarantino can easily be spotted in the outlandish shoot-out sequences. *Metal Gear Solid* is also ever-present

Both characters have eight stages to complete, each culminating in a boss encounter. Sounds rather uninspired but the focus here is on the visual quality of every bloody encounter. Producer Horigami Atsushi wants to capture the balletic majesty of a John Woo or Tarantino shoot-out. There's also a conspicuous 'Matrix' influence in the unusual hacking feature – the characters can download representations of themselves into a computer network to retrieve important files. Here the computer defence systems can only be fought using hand-to-hand combat.

Apparently it's also possible to download new fighting techniques while online. Sound familiar?

Slightly more original perhaps, is the use of true analogue control throughout. The distance a projectile weapon is thrown, or how far you jump, depends on how hard the button is pushed. Controls are further refined with the inclusion of a targeting system featuring optional autolock. This can also be used to scan environments and objects.

It all sounds stylish and sexy, but Konami has actually missed a real trick: Takara's range of figures includes a few licensed characters, including Princess from 'Battle of the Planets'. **Edge** is certain that a considerable audience would pay whatever was asked for a chance to control this object of '80s adolescent desire.





Cool Girl represents a heavily stylised take on the action adventure genre, featuring 'Matrix'-style sequences in which the lead characters infiltrate computer networks (above)







Chrome Hound

Format: **TBC**
Publisher: **From Software**
Developer: **In-house**
Origin: **Japan**
Release: **2004 (Japan), TBC (UK)**

From Software mines its Armoured Core for more mech action, but a team-based online mode singles this one out from the robo-crowd...





Gameplay is team-based, with five on each side. Four of those hit the battlefield as soldiers while one watches the action from a tactical nerve centre

From Software's latest robotic combat opus borrows its 3D engine from *Armoured Core*, and re-employs the theme of building and customising your own mechs. From here, the titles diverge, *Chrome Hound* employing more realistic settings (Paris forms one of the backgrounds) and a sparser palate. More importantly, the new game is based around a tenplayer online mode, where participants from around the world will be divided into two groups of five to engage in battle. Each team consists of four fighters and one operator who watches the action unfold on a special tactical map, handing out orders to those on the field of combat. The fighters, meanwhile, can choose from four different classes of mech – sniper, heavy gunner, attacker and scout – a feature inspired as much by the roles available in *Counter-Strike*, *Battlefield 1942* et al, as by traditional RPG classes.

Although From Software has announced a multiformat release plan, it hasn't named specific machines. But with an emphasis on online action – and support for voice comms promised – PS2 and Xbox must be the focal points. There will surely be offline play modes, too, so there is room for a GC appearance. It seems, however, that engaging in apocalyptic mech-on-mech slaughter can no longer be considered a solo pursuit.



Chrome Hound features realistic rather than fantastical sci-fi environs. The Paris level features a mega boss in front of the Eiffel Tower

Front Mission 4

Format: **PlayStation2**
Publisher: **Square Enix**
Developer: **In-house**
Origin: **Japan**
Release: **December 14 (Japan), TBC (UK)**

Square exhumes the RPG strategy series with a new sequel and a nostalgic wallow through its back catalogue

After the commercial failure of both *Front Mission 3* and *Front Mission Alternative* on PSone it looked like the end for this mech-themed strategy RPG series. But Square Enix is determined to revive the brand, hoping to drum up interest in *FM4* by reminding gamers about the game's heritage. Recently, the company released *Front Mission First* on PSone, a new version of the original 1995 Super Famicom title. In December it will present a limited edition box set named *Front Mission History* containing *Front Mission First*, *Second* and *Third* as well as three robot figurines (see p72). With only 20,000 available you'll need to get to that importer fast.

The culmination of this trip down mecha-memory lane, of course, is *Front Mission 4* itself. Allegedly ten times larger than *FM3* and boasting full 3D visuals, the key aim with this project is to answer complaints levelled at its predecessor. And that's almost the extent of the information currently available. Plot-wise, you'll be able to choose from two different characters – Elsa, a panzer officer, and Darril, a mercenary – with the game scenario changing accordingly. The visuals have an attractive steely sharpness, and the mech and vehicle design is predictably cool. Which should be enough to pique the interest of fans who've strayed from the series.



Two opposing lead characters – Darril and Elsa – form the basis of the action. What they're fighting over hasn't been made clear yet. But what does that matter?



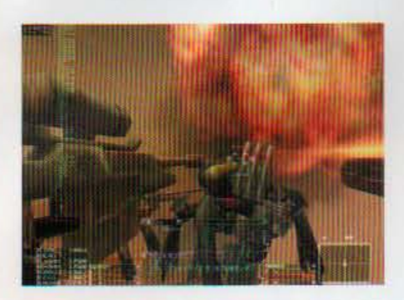


Front Mission 4 features full 3D visuals for the first time in the series' history. Clearly, Square Enix wants to start afresh with this PS2 incarnation

Junk Metal

Format: **PC**
Publisher: **Square Enix**
Developer: **In-house**
Origin: **Japan**
Release: **TBC**

The traditional Middle Earth-inspired MMRPG may have had its day. Watch out – the robots are moving online…





Junk Metal employs the Lithtech Jupiter 3D engine so we can expect these detailed landscapes to look good *and* move smoothly

Square Enix is already working on *Front Mission Online*, an MMRPG version of the mech/RPG series, aimed at PS2's online gamers. Now, it has a PC equivalent in beta testing. Clearly, total domination of the online robot war subgenre is desired.

Junk Metal provides a 3D environment where communication and combat with other participants provides the core of the experience. Naturally customisation is another key element. There are 350 weapons and 400 body parts available, and six areas of your machine can be modified. Compromise, as ever, plays a part. The mech can carry up to eight weapons, but speed and agility will take a hit if all spaces are taken up. Parts come in different sizes and not all are compatible with each other. As an amusing extra, the robot can be set up to run on three different operating systems, allegedly based around Windows, Linux and MacOS.

Once a suitable mechanoid has been assembled, players explore the varied environments, forming combat groups of up to five members. The exploration takes place in thirdperson, but during battle you switch to a firstperson cockpit view. So, plenty of hi-tech hardware, but little news yet on what everyone is fighting over. Square is obviously taking its PR approach from the American military.



The game takes in forest, desert and beach settings, among others, across which you can stomp and shoot with your customised mech

UniversalCentury.net Gundam Online

Format: **PC**
Publisher: **Bandai**
Developer: **In-house**
Origin: **Japan**
Release: **Winter (Japan), TBC (UK)**

The Japanese manga epic returns to videogame form with massively multiplayer online ambitions. Is this the stuff of mech fanboy fantasies?



With *Galaxies* beginning to recover from its early – and quite spectacular – technical problems, Bandai is developing an MMRPG based on Japan's nearest 'Star Wars' equivalent, *Gundam*. It's an ambitious project that should allow for 160,000 users.

The play area is a 1,000,000km sphere surrounding Earth and taking in the planet's surface as well as the moon and several colonies. Each participant is a citizen of Earth and is free to follow whatever path they wish, becoming shopkeepers, explorers, doctors, inventors or, of course, soldiers – representing one of two warring camps: the Federation or Zion. Naturally, each player has access to a mobile suit, which can be heavily customised. It's also possible to form groups with other players (communicating via keyboard or voice) before going into battle for whatever cause.

Its clear from the size of the game and quality of the visuals that Bandai is aiming at high-spec PCs. Don't expect to be able to join in on anything less than a P4. What you *can* expect is multinational support – the game is being designed for the Japanese, Korean and English languages. The western MMRPG market is crowded these days, and it will be interesting to see if a Japanese take on the genre can succeed – or at least bring something new to the party.



The quality of the visuals in the game is right up there with the better western MMRPGs. A high-spec PC will be absolutely essential





Gundam Online makes use of two perspectives – a thirdperson set-up for exploration and a firstperson cockpit view for battle scenes





Gran Turismo 4: Prologue

Format: **PlayStation2**
Publisher: **SCEI**
Developer: **Polyphony Digital**
Origin: **Japan**
Release: **December 4 (Japan)**

Previously in **E**125

With the release of GT4 delayed, Polyphony has come up with a little racing simulation methadone to keep the fans hooked



GT4 Prologue features 45 cars, rather than the 500 promised in *GT4*. Some have been confirmed as concepts from this year's Tokyo Motor Show

SCEI is becoming more daring, you may even say flagrant, with its *GT* side projects. Two years ago *GT Concept* was a seriously cut-down version of *GT3* sporting some wacky Tokyo Motor Show concept cars. Gossamer stuff, but it helped boost sales of the full game and no doubt fared reasonably well itself. For this year's Motor Show event, the company is releasing *Prologue*, which is little more than a demo of *GT4*. But why distribute for free what you can actually *sell* to thousands of fans desperately awaiting the main event?

And so *Prologue* is a seductive *GT4* tease, offering 45 cars (among them a few concept vehicles from the show), five circuits and support for the revised Logitech GT Force Pro controller. Yamauchi-san has justified the release claiming that going straight into the full game would be too much for most gamers – *Prologue* provides a more user-friendly entry point, complete with a driving school. The hope, he says, is to entice newcomers to the dauntingly comprehensive series. Tellingly, though, a few of the vehicles included in *Prologue* may be left out of the full release, so even *GT* veterans will have to pay out.

Is this the beginning of a new trend, with publishers funding the development of major projects with promo editions? **Edge** wouldn't be at all surprised.





Prologue reveals the impressively diverse environments we can expect from *GT4*, including detailed cities and photo-realistic rural locales

Richard Burns Rally

Format: **PC, Xbox, PS2**
Publisher: **SCi**
Developer: **Warthog (Sweden)**
Origin: **Sweden**
Release: **Spring 2004**

Not so long ago Burns was mocking McRae over the Scot's association with videogames. Guess who's laughing now?





The game promises realtime weather effects which could make things very interesting. In the event of a crash, spectators rush over to help



Colin McRae began his videogame career in a Subaru Impreza and now it's Richard Burns' turn (the Englishman has signed with the team for the 2004 season). Handling characteristics are still a mystery but the sense of speed is good and the game does boast some individual touches

Any more room for another rally game? SCi thinks so. So convinced is the publisher, in fact, that it has signed up the rights to Britain's most prolific rally driver of the last few years (sorry McRae fans, the truth hurts).

With Sony holding onto the WRC licence for its own franchise (see *WRC3* on p123), SCi has had to create its own game from a variety of rally events that fall outside of the WRC calendar. So you'll find licensed events from Finland, Australia, England, France (specifically, the French Alps), Japan and the US. In terms of machinery, eight of the usual suspects make an appearance.

On a more exciting note, the team promises an unparalleled physics model which, when combined with the three dimensional system for generating the track, should make this the most realistic game of its type to date. **Edge** hasn't been allowed anywhere near a joypad or force feedback wheel, but it has seen the theory that backs up the developer's claim.

Also ambitious is the damage system, which promises to take incidents such as engine fires, fuel leaks and brake failure into account. Just one of several examples of the game's emphasis on authenticity which SCi expects to help differentiate its offering from the (strong) competition.

Prescreen Alphas This month's announcements and updates...

kill.switch

Format: PlayStation2
Publisher: SCEE
Developer: Namco





Sony has picked up Namco's thirdperson action military shooter. **Edge** played the game at E3 and things were looking promising, with arcade-oriented gameplay. Expect a February release

Front Mission 1st

Format: PSone
Publisher: Square Enix
Developer: In-house



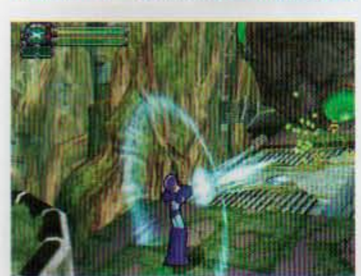


Not quite a straightforward port of the SNES title: although the graphics are identical, this version introduces a new campaign that sheds new light on the plot of the original robot tactics title

Mega Man X7

Format: PlayStation2
Publisher: Capcom
Developer: In-house (Production Studio 3)

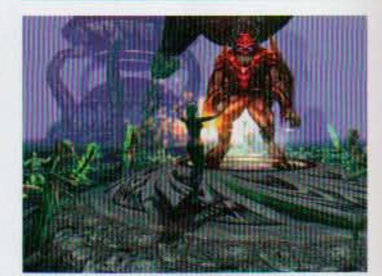




Mixing both 2D and 3D as well as dual character play, Capcom's latest *Mega Man* continues to hold **Edge**'s interest with its unusually dark overtones. A more in-depth analysis next month

Neverwinter Nights: Hordes of the Underdark

Format: PC
Publisher: Atari
Developer: BioWare





Edge hasn't yet managed to play the new singleplayer scenario yet, but there's plenty here for budding DMs, from Beholders to Weapon Masters to Mind Flayer tunnels. **Edge** can't wait

Armored Core Nexus

Format: PlayStation2
Publisher: From Software
Developer: In-house





Coming on two discs, *Nexus* offers a blend of classic missions from previous titles in the series as well as a healthy dose of new additions. There's also the prospect of a fourplayer mode

F-Zero Falcon Densetsu

Format: Game Boy Advance
Publisher: Nintendo
Developer: In-house



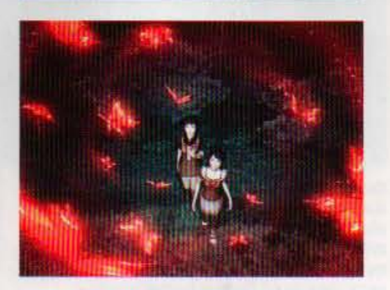


Based on the new TV anime series that has recently started airing in Japan, the latest *F-Zero* update features all the speed/handling hallmarks of the series with a more character-driven slant

Fatal Frame 2: Crimson Butterfly

Format: PlayStation2
Publisher: Tecmo
Developer: In-house





The ancient camera has been given a number of new functions for this exciting sequel and **Edge** is certain that Tecmo will imbue this PS2 version with as much spooky atmosphere as the original

Ghost Hunter

Format: PlayStation2
Publisher: SCEE
Developer: In-house (Cambridge Studio)





Too buggy to review this issue, *Ghost Hunter* nevertheless has many decent ideas and looks absolutely stunning. Hopefully the technical flaws can be ironed out by next month...





Full Spectrum Warrior

'If you're going to war, you take an Xbox.' And not just to use as a club. Edge meets the team who is bringing its urban terrain training simulator to the only console the US army judged tough enough to handle it...

'You DO something. It looks COOL. You feel SMART.' It's the first thing **Edge** sees scrawled on Pandemic's whiteboard, and over the next few hours it will become apparent how well it has implemented its mantra into *Full Spectrum Warrior*.

The core of the game is very simple. You control two teams of four – a team leader, a grenadier, a rifleman and an automatic rifleman.

Instructions – which boil down to move and fire – can be issued to the team as a whole, or to each individual via the D-pad. The soldiers respond as trained infantrymen would, assuming the correct formation to round corners and returning fire if fired upon. But this isn't *Conflict: Desert Storm*, you have no direct control over your men – you never run anywhere, you never pull a trigger.

From these simple building blocks, *FSW* allows for the formulation of fairly complex manoeuvres. 'Bounding' allows you to split the team into a two-by-two move and cover pattern: first select the point you want your men to reach, then select the fire sector you want the first two men to cover when they reach that point. Set it in motion and your team will execute, the last two covering the first two and then the first two returning the favour. Get your second team in on the act and your head starts to hurt. Negotiating ten feet in *FSW* is as taxing as 100 yards in many superficially similar games.

But what made the US army choose Pandemic in the first place? "God knows!" says the firm's president, **Josh Resnick**, happily.

- Format: **Xbox**
- Publisher: **THQ**
- Developer: **Pandemic**
- Origin: **US**
- Release: **2004**



A full spectrum warrior is one trained with all weapons and in all terrain. As a consequence, if one of your men is shot the others will move up to take his place and, if necessary, his weapons

"It kind of fell in our lap. I don't know if we were the first people they asked or the tenth, but we were local and they knew we had experience in immersive strategy games."

Lead designer **Laralyn McWilliams** adds: "They were very struck by the vision. Some of the other developers were talking about fairly dry, map based simulations, but our director had read 'Black Hawk Down' and he wanted to make something really cinematic and visceral."

That director, **Will Stahl**, explains "They needed something that would give them a lot of real world training value for the money they were putting in, and there's no training value in having someone shooting a gun in a videogame. What can be taught is tactics, how to move, how to manage formations, where fire is likely to come from." But it wasn't just the strategic thinking. The army wanted to teach the players to weigh the lives of their men very heavily. Giving them voices and personalities makes it hit much harder when one is killed. "They are



Pandemic's progress



Pandemic was founded in 1998 when the teams behind *Battlezone* and *Dark Reign* splintered off from Activision. **Edge** talked to Josh Resnick, president and co-founder, about the success of a very unusual start-up.

How did you convince Activision to let you go?

At Activision, I was a director of production on *Battlezone* and *Dark Reign* and other strategy productions. In our senior meetings we were seeing teams and key personnel breaking away from competitors of Activision – this was in 1997 – and they were coming to Activision saying: 'We want to work with you.' We realised that, inevitably, this was going to happen to us, this was going to happen to Activision. And there's only so far people can climb within an organisation before they have to go into a management role, and a lot of creative types don't want to do that, so how do we deal with that? We didn't want to have the approach of saying: 'Oh, you don't want to work here any more? Fine. Then leave.'

It was at about that time that my friend and colleague Andrew Goldman came to me, and said that he wanted to leave and start his own company, and that he wanted me to come with him.

How did Activision respond?

They were great. They allowed us to take the technology we were working on out of the studio and use it to make the sequels of *Battlezone* and *Dark Reign*. We were able to take those original teams with us, and we didn't have to take on any other investors or debt because Activision fully funded the advances for starting up the studio. And they did a multi-project deal with us, so I was able to go out to new staff and say: 'Look at this stable environment. We have sequels, technology, people we're used to and money in the bank.' It made all the difference.

Overall, was it a tactic that worked?

Nope. It seems like the experiment failed. I don't want to sound arrogant, but none of the others have done as well as Pandemic. Maybe because we had enough scale, and because we were working on sequels to existing projects. Maybe it was the right combination of people. It's hard for me to comment on the other spin-offs, since I wasn't involved.

How's your relationship with Activision now?

It's a very positive relationship, but it's not a working relationship. We wanted to head in the direction of making a different type of game to what they were used to us making, and we didn't want to be so focused on the PC. Activision wasn't ready for us to make that jump, so we parted ways, nicely.

Do you think they're kicking themselves for letting you go, now that things are going so well?

Yes and no. I don't think they had any choice. Ultimately, the talent is going to leave. There's going to be a culture gap. Also, they retained a five per cent ownership in Pandemic, so they will benefit from our success.

How will you cope with the same challenge? What if your talent wants to quit?

It's a constant struggle. We are now of a size – two studios with 150 people – that we have to be very focused on maintaining our small company structure. We're already getting to a point where we have to have policies and rules – things that start to appear corporate.

We have a dedicated social director making sure we stay fun and maintain a creative environment. We have a chess club, a book club, a poker competition and monthly videogame tournaments.

And if all else fails, make sure you keep your five per cent?

(Laughs) Yes. Good thinking.

never just meat shields," says Stahl. It's certainly been a turbulent three years over which to be developing such a politically sensitive game, what effect has it had? Resnick sobers, saying: "It's a cliché, but 9-11 changed everything. It's maybe true that the American government and the US army aren't enjoying a lot of popularity at the moment, but I think *FSW* is sending out a really interesting message. It shows what the army cares about on the ground, how much time it spends drilling the rules of engagement into its soldiers – protect civilians, don't violate cultural spaces."

Are they worried it might hurt international sales? Resnick again: "I'm hoping that it won't. I don't think people blame the individual soldiers, and that's what *FSW* is about. We look at the game as having a very strong anti-war message. It's so gritty, so real, that you are shocked and overwhelmed by it."

McWilliams, who comes from an army background, always saw the game as requiring an M ('mature') certificate: "I insisted on it from the start, because there were two things I wasn't prepared to compromise on. One was the authentic portrayal of the awfulness of combat. We don't have a lot of blood, but the terrified response of the soldiers, the grief and shock they experience when one of them dies, that deserves an M rating right there. And I wanted to make sure our soldiers talked like soldiers – I wasn't willing to cut the cursing and the crude references because that's how they deal with the stress."

But the brutality of the experience has had an impact on how playable the game was for ordinary consumers.

Stahl tells of how playtester after playtester simply locked up when faced with their first enemy contact. It sounds like the usual developer hyperbole, but he isn't kidding. During the demonstration, when Alpha Team came under fire, every journalist in the room froze, pens in mid-air, pulverised by the noise and paralysed by the weight of responsibility for the men.

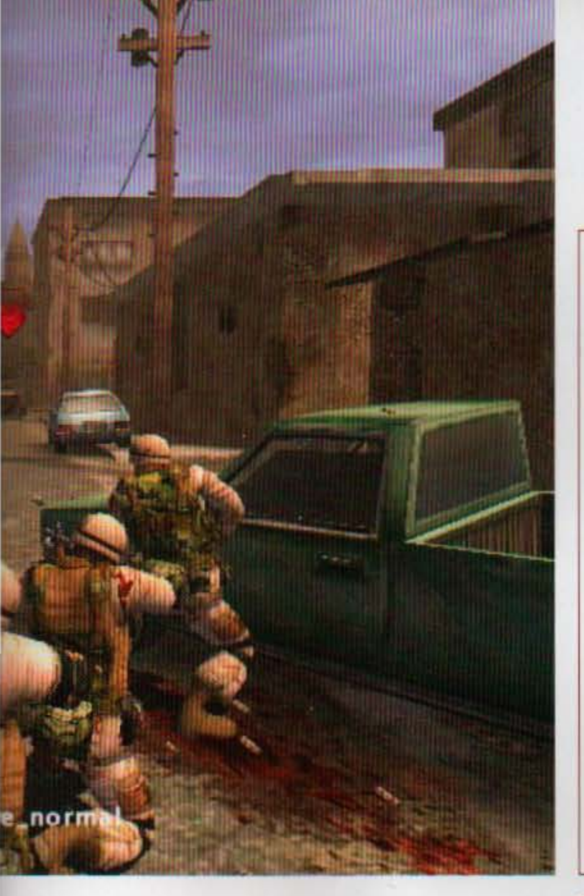
The terror of the moment is exacerbated by the fact that the soldiers won't move out of the range of heavy fire unless you order them to,

> **"We don't have a lot of blood, but the terrified response of the soldiers, the grief and shock they experience when one of them dies, that deserves an M rating"**





Armed trucks can pin a whole team down and are near impervious to rifle fire. Sneak your second team up until your grenadier is in position and the problem soon evaporates



Fire in focus

The game hinges on an individual's fire sector – the slice of terrain each soldier is covering with his weapon. FSW communicates this by a realtime fog-of-war effect showing the extent of the visual range of either the individual or the team.



Any wounded must be returned to a 'casevac' point to be picked up by helicopter. However, the chopper can't land until you've secured the area, which can be difficult with a man down



and Stahl explains how some early testers complained about the poor AI of the troops, not understanding that soldiers are trained not to retreat until you give them the order to.

"I think we underestimated the amount of work it was going to take to make the transition. When we made the army game, we knew we were making it for men who were trained in how to cross a street, who knew the capabilities of all the different weapons. But we have to assume our players don't know any of that."

The structure of some missions has also had to be changed. "The army's goal is to avoid conflict, but players are used to seeing enemy contact as an invitation to fight." Some missions were too dry and repetitive, so more variation and narrative will be included in the commercial version.

The interface also presented problems. The army wanted to train their men to respond to aural cues, relying on voice reports about ammo status and wounded troopers. Early players coped very poorly with the lack of visual data, and so Pandemic had to experiment with a more conventional HUD.

So far, its work has been a success. **Edge** was only able to play one mission – a tense negotiation of a few streets in order to mark enemy tanks with a smoke grenade so US helicopters could target them.



Progress is slow. Every window on every floor, every box in every alley could hide an enemy. And in *FSW*, as in war, bullets that hit are bullets that kill. When games are brandished at **Edge** as being 'realistic', what most developers often mean is 'cinematic,' but Pandemic has been forced by its army advisors to deliver something completely stripped of the usual gaming conceits. Stark, fresh and compelling, it means the game has a powerful potential to worm its way into your brain. Emerging from Pandemic's offices onto a busy intersection had a briefly terrified **Edge** checking its lines of fire and scanning the rooftops before remembering that it was unlikely to be attacked by anything worse than a doped-up taxi driver.

As well as plans to make more training games for the army, Resnick is looking into the possibility of striking similar deals with bodies like the fire service, police and the FBI, but McWilliams has more indulgent hopes for the engine: "I'd love to make a Western, and I'd love the chance to remake X-COM." (See p128)



Pandemic currently has three more projects in production, and another in development, but won't breathe a word on any of them. "We're very well trained," says McWilliams. "But I can promise you your jaw is going to drop." **Edge** couldn't get hold of anything concrete, but it did spy three enticing words scrawled on the whiteboard. You may want to keep your eyes peeled for them: 'Destroy All Humans!'



Your men will adopt the best formation for the terrain, shown by a pattern of four cursors which adapt as you move around







Transformers Armada: Prelude to Energon

How do you take on a cursed licence and turn it into a prime property? Melbourne House talks Edge through a remarkable transformation…

Spend five minutes with *Transformers Armada* and it changes the way you think. Suddenly, Transformers seems like the most desirable game licence ever. Distinctive, vibrant heroes, an inherently two-tone game mechanic, magnificently odious villains and *that* sound effect. And so the question becomes not 'why were all those Transformers games so bad?' but 'how come they weren't all brilliant?'

The game centres on the war over the Mini-cons, a newly discovered race of teeny Transformers who can bolt onto their big brothers to enhance their powers with a selection of fitments straight from any robot's Christmas list: rocket launchers and dash jets, heat vision and glider wings. It's the perfect game set up. Hot Shot, Optimus Prime and Red Alert smash their way through Megatron's clone army to save the Transforminis and in return they take advantage of their abilities to defeat the Decepticons.

It means that as well as powering the plot, the 40 different Mini-cons drive the gameplay. Each Autobot can carry up to four, although since each drains a different amount of power, you can only plug in as many as your Autobot can support. Hot Shot, the fastest and lightest of the team has the lowest Mini-con rating, thunderingly heavy Optimus the highest. This is the tactical heart of the game – will you kit your Transformer out as a specialist? Bolt together the ultimate stealth operator from glider wings, invisibility, heat vision and sniper scope? Or will you spread your bets with boosting rockets, speed and shields to create a full spectrum robo-warrior? It's also the core of the game's replay value, since the Mini-cons will facilitate the exploration of levels but also necessitate it, as you hunt out the better-hidden ones.

But this alluring set-up doesn't change the fact that a year ago the licence still looked a little like a poisoned chalice.

Andrew Carter, executive producer on *Armada*, had some reservations when Atari approached Melbourne House with the Transformers brand. "The question was how could we remain true and accurate to Transformers but in a style that would be right for a PS2 game? It's a slightly older demographic than the cartoons and toys, so we needed something with more attitude, more

- Format: **PlayStation2**
- Publisher: **Atari**
- Developer: **In-house (Melbourne House)**
- Origin: **Australia**
- Release: **May 2004 (UK)**





The core of the *Armada* engine is built, oddly, on the work Melbourne House did for *Grand Prix Challenge*, a game which reportedly surprised Sony with the enhanced performance it rung out of the increasingly mature PlayStation2







The Energon in the game's title refers to the power source that all Transformers use. It's this signal that the heat-seeking Mini-con locks on to, allowing you to see enemy movements through trees, and behind hills

sophistication." Talks with Hasbro and Atari soon allayed his fears: "As I began to understand the depth of support and the complete freedom that we were to be given, we soon became committed to the project."

But the one hard and fast restriction was in direct contradiction to his objective: neither Autobots nor Decepticons could be killed outright. "It would have been a fatal restriction in this kind of game," acknowledges Carter. "Players need something they can blow to shreds."

As a result, Melbourne House came up with the Decepticlones, an explosively disposable army of drones, reserving the Decepticons themselves for end-of-level boss battles.

The other cross every licence has to bear is the bear-pit of obsessive fanboys. It's all too easy to alienate what ought to be your strongest market by making one tiny continuity error. Carter doesn't weigh their concerns too heavily: "To be honest," he counters, "our most important consideration was to make a game that was good enough to stand by itself." That said, every effort has been made to treat the licence with respect. Every Autobot and Decepticon has been modelled with great precision and care. The team referred back to the original Japanese concept drawings, and the result is super-accurate high-resolution 12,000 polygon in-game models.

"The team referred back to the original Japanese concept drawings, and the result is super-accurate high-resolution 12,000 polygon in-game models"

Watching Hot Shot fold in on himself, **Edge** can't help but feel that Melbourne House has a rather more detailed grasp of Autobot anatomy than those responsible for the four frames of animation which covered the manoeuvre in the cartoons.

There's no denying the stab of disappointment **Edge** felt when hearing it confirmed that only three Transformers would be playable in the game, especially since it's been emphatically denied that there are any unlockable characters. With such an







Armada's cut-scenes will use million-polygon models, and be produced by Japanese legend BuildUp, who worked on *Panzer Dragoon Orta*





Of all the Mini-cons **Edge** saw, the one with the greatest gameplay impact was the glider. You will have up to four boosts at your disposal, which enable you to get off the ground, and gain a bit of height as you float


2m
5m
6m
12m
8m
4m
10m
6m

impressive roster to choose from, isn't this short-changing the series' fans? Carter has a passionate answer. "I think games have been getting bloated with numbers. It's unfortunate that it's become the only way of quickly conveying the scope or appeal of the game. But I think game players are becoming suspicious of numbers by themselves. Imagine going to see a movie because it last two hours and 42 minutes instead of another that only lasts two hours dead. I don't want to make games driven by superficial things like the number of levels and characters. Our emphasis is certainly quality over quantity and we take the view that less is more when it's done right."

And as a perfect example of less being more, he invites you to do a little arithmetic. Start with three Autobots, who each have a robot mode and a vehicle mode. Each is accompanied by a permanent Mini-con sidekick, about whom Melbourne House isn't giving much away. But it's clear so far these also have two modes, and – tantalizingly – can both combine and 'powerlinx' with their big brothers.

And then you have the four-strong Mini-con teams you can freely assemble around each character. **Edge** ran out of fingers and toes to count on a while ago, but Melbourne House claims that all adds up to a massive 29,000 combinations.

The game is spread over eight environments, ranging from rainforest to Arctic wastes to a crashed space shuttle. The opening Amazon level alone stretches the equivalent of eight square miles. The size of the levels is well calibrated to the Autobot nature of the main characters. The dull trudging of other games that see size as a virtue regardless of its emptiness is irrelevant in a game where you can convert to a sports car at the touch of a button. Some areas will remain inaccessible until you discover the appropriate Mini-con, but when you do return, don't expect an easy ride. Enemy forces will be reinforced with newer, tougher models to ensure that the challenge remains constant throughout. Each level forms a consistent – and persistent – whole.

"Enemy forces will be reinforced with newer, tougher models to ensure the challenge remains constant throughout. Each level forms a consistent – and persistent – whole"

You can take any route you fancy, complete objectives in the wrong order or even skip over the ones that don't appeal.

Boss battles, rather than being confined to the contrived arenas most games impose, will take place over the whole scope of the level.

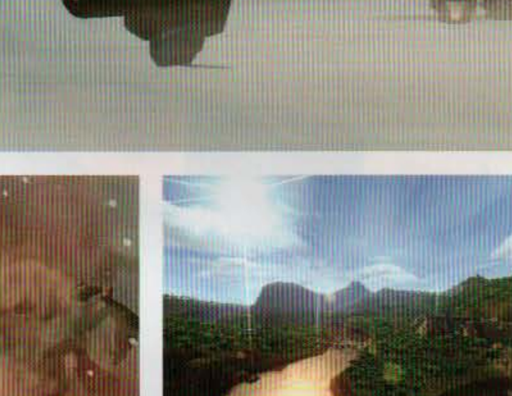
And when you're a truck and your opponent is a helicopter then eight square miles suddenly sounds just about right. It's similar thinking that

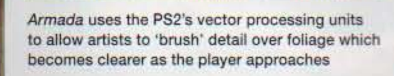




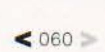








Armada uses the PS2's vector processing units to allow artists to 'brush' detail over foliage which becomes clearer as the player approaches



has prevented the inclusion of a multiplayer mode in this version. Unwilling to produce a shoddy splitscreen game, and aware that PS2 online take-up was still so limited, the decision was taken to keep *Armada* as singleplayer only.

While **Edge** never likes to see games padded out with last-minute extra 'features', this seems a real shame. The free-roaming scale of the levels and the subtle possibilities of the Mini-con system could have made for some truly legendary death matches. Second-guessing your opponent's set-up and ram-raiding each other in trucks is a prospect that makes **Edge** hungry for a sequel.

These limitations shouldn't, however, mean a lack of freedom. Players can swap freely between Autobots throughout the game, although it will be possible to complete it using only one.

Mini-con set-ups can be altered at any of the checkpoints positioned throughout each level. And, of course, there's no restriction on transforming. The temptation to try out your wheels on patently unsuitable sections of each level is deliciously irresistible.

The Decepticlones you meet as you explore may be spectacular cannon fodder, but they're far from dumb. Building on the AI techniques they have learned through programming driving games, Melbourne House is striving for a level playing field. Enemies can communicate with each other, they have knowledge of the terrain and will judge their tactics according to how strong a position they judge you to be in. Different bots have different characters, some more likely to attack relentlessly, where others will fall back and call in reinforcements.

It should provide a cerebral counterbalance to the gloriously thunking metal physicality of the hand-to-hand combat.

Perhaps what is most impressive about the game is that the code **Edge** played was pre-alpha, and yet was already accomplished enough to grab our attention. There's no point making a Transformers game where you feel like a geek in an elaborate cereal-box suit, you need to feel like a 20-foot-high avenger, an unstoppable mesh of gears and pistons heavy enough to shatter granite yet precise enough to turn on a one-inch washer.



While it is not clear how far through the game the Arctic levels are, they were a real challenge. With a great deal of the game structurally complete, there is time in hand for balancing and polish

As things stand, it's a feeling *Transformers Armada* shows every promise of being able to deliver.

So maybe it's that simple. Maybe only now has the technology become equal to the task of making a good Transformers game.

Or perhaps the technology is irrelevant, and all that was needed was an imaginative, game-literate and committed team.

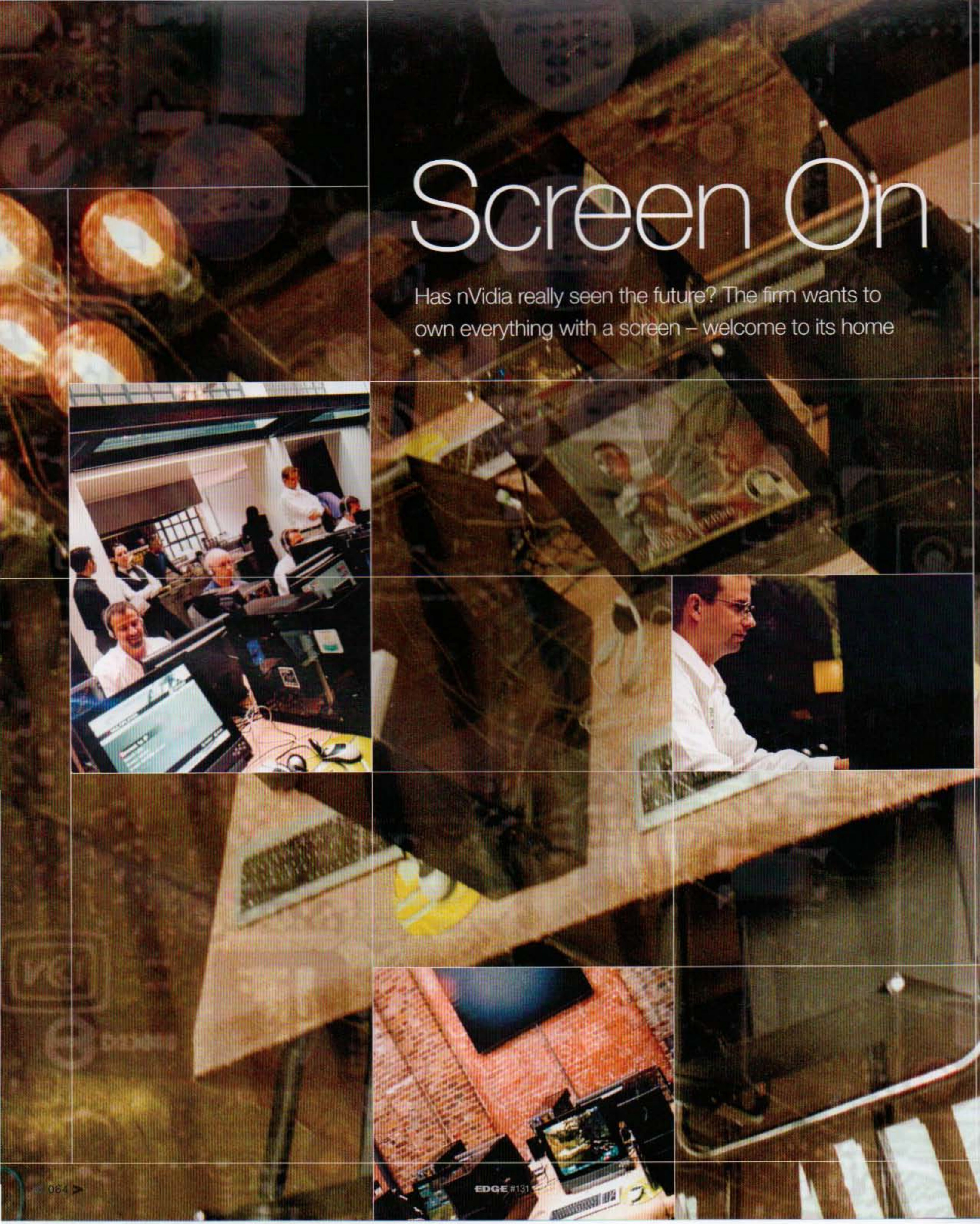
Either way, **Edge** looks forward to finding out if it's succeeded in breaking the jinx.





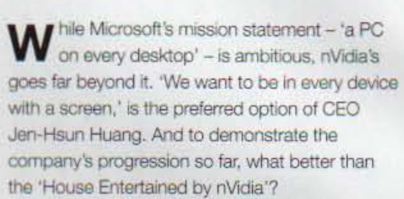
As part of the game's emphasis on freedom, the Autobots can take over any enemy vehicles or gun emplacements they find – or perhaps forcibly make – empty





Screen On

Has nVidia really seen the future? The firm wants to own everything with a screen – welcome to its home



While Microsoft's mission statement – 'a PC on every desktop' – is ambitious, nVidia's goes far beyond it. 'We want to be in every device with a screen,' is the preferred option of CEO Jen-Hsun Huang. And to demonstrate the company's progression so far, what better than the 'House Entertained by nVidia'?

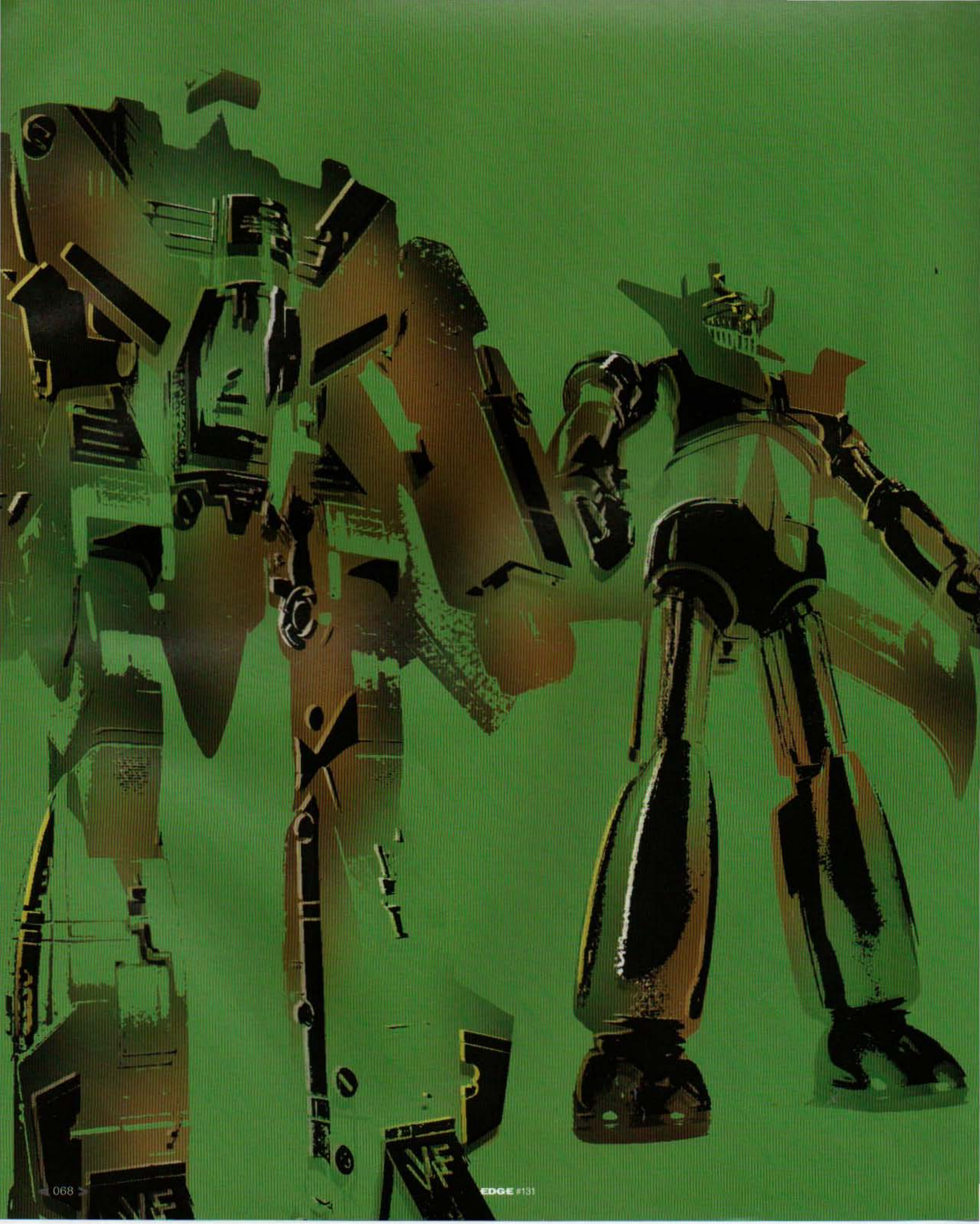
Edge is taken to a converted violin factory on the outskirts of Waterloo station, now home (literally) to an architectural couple who work and live in the impressive three-storey glass, steel and red brick pile. For a couple of days it also underlines the ever-growing reach in the home of the nVidia corporation.

Obvious first stop is the kids' games room – lucky kids who can boast the latest £400 FX5900 graphics card. Lesser mortals should benefit from nVidia's 'The Way It's Meant To Be Played' campaign. This ensures all games co-promoted under the scheme will work on nVidia's hardware ranging from the antediluvian TNT2s up through the GeForce and FX ranges.

Personal cinema is another nVidian focus, with most cards now offering TV-out options, as well as dedicated DVD playback codecs, which are packaged within nVidia's ForceWare suite.

Extra goodies within ForceWare are also on display in the study, with Dad's twin monitor set-up. One neat trick is the new zoom facility, which allows you to set up one screen as a massive magnifying glass for the other – useful for the visually impaired as well as those removing dust spots from digital photos.

The biggest sell, however, is Microsoft's Windows Media Centre. Designed to get the PC into the centre of the living room, and looking more like a fashionable piece of audio/visual hardware than a big beige box, nVidia features in 13 of the 15 currently available Windows Media Centre variants. Providing dedicated hardware decoders for TV signals as well as more standard graphics oomph, multi-channel surround sound and DVD playback, it sees the company continuing its drive for ubiquity. And its next step, thanks to the purchase of embedded silicon specialist MediaQ, will be mobile phones. Watch out.


VF



BIG ROBOT LOVE

Japan's 30-year love affair with big robots is almost as intense as **Edge**'s own. From 'Astro Boy' to 'Gundam Seed', this aspect of Japanese culture has provided videogame developers with a rich seam of inspiration. **Edge** delves further...

Ever since 'Tetsuwan Atom' first graced Japanese TV screens at the start of the '60s, the nation has had an enduring love affair with big robots – an affair that has had a long and fruitful relationship with videogames.

This sci-fi retelling of 'Pinocchio' about a robot boy with an atomic heart, known as 'Astro Boy' in the west, was to spawn a wave of successors featuring ever more grandiose robot designs, and ever more Byzantine back-stories.

It kick-started an interest that has culminated, in recent years, in a multitude of anime series that span a broad swathe of merchandising opportunities. Series such as 'Gundam', a cultural behemoth that has generated countless sequels, parallel universes, toys and, of course, plenty of videogames.

The widespread cultural diffusion of the super-robot genre in Japan is unmatched anywhere else in the world, which is why it's such an intriguing phenomenon. Perhaps there's something distinct about the Japanese psyche that has enabled it to take root.

"It's always surprising to hear the response to robot heroes overseas," states **Kenji Uchida**, managing director of Sunrise, the animation studio behind various giant robot series, including 'Gundam'. "Nobody in Japan considers the genre so exceptional, which is why it is difficult for me to find an explanation for what people outside Japan see as a phenomenon. Having said that I think there are a few reasons for its popularity. People in Asia have a very different vision of the environment, that mankind is not that special. Our philosophy is that the human being is just one component of a larger picture, the whole of nature."

But perhaps there's also something about that first wave of super robot heroes that enabled them to capture a zeitgeist in Japan that has proved more elusive overseas.

"There were other creations before 'Tetsuwan Atom' but it is commonly and rightly seen as the very start of robot

Continued >

heroes in Japan," continues Uchida-san. "It created a new trend. It had a hero with incredible power, yet with a heart inside its artificial body."

Koji Morimoto, chief producer at Bandai Visual, an animation/DVD production firm, agrees about the importance of 'Tetsuwan Atom': "I think this is the ultimate source of the

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"There were to be more than 40 different giant-robot anime series by the mid-1980s. More recently, 'Shin Seiki Evangelion' (1995) and 'Gundam Seed' (2002) have dominated robot animation"

2 

3 

4

robot genre, starting with the manga and then as anime," he explains. "I believe there was a widespread belief at the time that technology would make life better as Japan was getting more and more involved in the development of technologies. The concurrent development of sci-fi themes in manga and books opened the way, naturally, for the arrival of robots. Since everything big was better, the robots had to be big."

New breed

'Mazinger Z' was really the first super robot hero, according to Morimoto-san. "It was something completely new. You had this high school student named Kabuto Koji, a simple young man, who piloted this big robot and fought bigger enemies to save the world from constant danger."

In much the same way as Marvel invigorated the superhero genre in the US by fleshing out its heroes' domestic tribulations and character flaws and failings, 'Maninger Z' added a surprisingly human dimension to the genre. "There was nothing like this at that time in Japan. He could have been someone's older brother, piloting this gigantic robot. And in a sense it was a toy on screen. It had been designed in such a way that the merchandising was involved, so the plot and the visuals were supported by merchandising, and because of the success of 'Mazinger Z' the toy industry decided to surf this new trend."

Ah, yes. Merchandising. 'Mazinger Z' was to establish a direction that was to be continued by the profusion of super robot series that were to follow – titles such as 'Mobile Suit Gundam' (1979), and 'Super Dimensional Fortress Macross' (1982). Indeed there were to be more than 40 different giant-robot anime series by the mid-1980s, most of which were supported by some sort of toy line. More recently, 'Shin Seiki Evangelion' (1995) and 'Gundam Seed' (2002) have dominated robot animation.

The initial success of super robots might be their appeal to the Japanese psyche, but their enduring allure is due to their association with merchandising, such as the early range of diecast super robot toys, 'Chogokin', produced by Bandai.

"'Evangelion' is a rare creation," points out Morimoto-san, "which has not been designed to sell toys. They came second in the process. It's normally the opposite, as with 'Gundam Seed', which was designed to sell toys. But, you know, this was also the case with the first 'Gundam', toys came first. At least that was the idea at the launch of the series."

This marketing dimension is likely to be the reason

1// **Koji Morimoto**
chief producer, Bandai Visual

2// **Hirofumi Inagaki**
producer, media department, Bandai Games

3// **Takayuki Shindo**
sub-leader, videogame department, Bandai Games

4// **Kenji Uchida**
managing director, Sunrise

A tiny selection from Bandai's prolific range of licensed robot toys



Photography: Hiroki Izumi

World markets

The second biggest market for the super robot genre outside of Japan is undoubtedly the US, though it remains a hobbyist market without widespread diffusion.

Uchida-san puts this down to a fundamental difference in philosophy between east and west: "I think there is a central difference in how people in Japan and in the west regard the human being. In the US everything is related to the human being – superheroes like Batman and Spider-Man are human beings.

"In Japan there are different types of hero, from Gundam to Ultraman and even Godzilla, which is not human but a monster. In Japan anything can become a hero. In the west heroes are mostly human. Japanese people go to shrines in order to get the help of forces, whose power surpasses ours. This could be a large tree, or a particular river. We don't ask for human help. There is not much place for Batman in the Japanese culture."

Nevertheless, the west has had its share of super robot heroes, heralded by the arrival on US shores of 'Robotech', in 1984. Carl Macek's adaptation of three three separate anime series ('Macross', 'Southern Cross', and 'Genesis Climber: Mospeada') paved the way for a subsequent wave of original or localised content. Content such as 'Transformers' and 'Gobots', which were themselves little more than disparate lines of transforming robot toys (now known by collectors as 'pre-Transformers') repackaged under new brands and supported by cartoons, movies and comics.

Perhaps the best example of this cultural overlap is in the shape of a Transformer called Jetfire (or Skyfire in the cartoons), who was a rebranded VF-1S Super Valkyrie – the 'Macross' craft that had already been recast as a star of 'Robotech', and that was also to double as a unit in tabletop wargame, 'BattleTech' (for which the game's publisher, FASA, was eventually to be sued).

'Gundam' on PS2

From December 4, fans of big robots and videogames will be able to satisfy both their cravings with the Japanese launch of a limited edition 'Gundam' PlayStation2. The 'Mobile Suit Zeta Gundam Hyakushiki Gold Pack' consists of a golden console, complete with a 'Mobile Suit Hyakushiki' logo, a copy of *Mobile Suit Z Gundam: AEUG vs Titans*, a nicely robotic-themed stand, and a 'Z Gundam' designed memory card. It's a steal at just ¥35,000 (£190).





'Gundam' has produced more videogame spin-offs than any other robot series. Indeed, 'Gundam' is probably the best example of the symbiosis between videogames and super robots – partly because it represents the current pinnacle of the super robot genre in terms of its high popularity.

The original 'Mobile Suit Gundam' debuted on Japanese television in 1979, taking its name from the mobile suit RX-78 Gundam, created by director Yoshiyuki Tomino and, under a nom de plume (Hajime Yatate) various other Sunrise staff. Its near 25-year history is the epitome of the Japanese love affair with the super robot genre.

According to **Takayuki Shindo**, the man behind the forthcoming *Gundam Online* MMRPG, 'Gundam' is comparable to 'Star Wars' in that its original teen audience has now grown up, but retains a love for the series that they have now passed on to their own kids.

Surprisingly, early videogames based on the series failed to interest this audience. The 'V Gundam'-inspired Super Famicom title sold disappointingly, as did the 'G Gundam' game, which sold only around 100,000 copies. But the transition to 3D ushered in by the release of the PlayStation prompted a surge in the popularity of the series.

"Everything changed with PlayStation" declares **Hirofumi Inagaki**, who successfully shaped 'Gundam' for the 3D graphics of the PlayStation and Saturn. "Most Gundam fans are addicted to the plastic models. With 3D graphics, we were able to create plastic models moving in realtime on screen. In a sense, 3D graphics offered a plastic model kingdom. The success was immediate and we were very surprised. What's more, most PlayStation owners were adults.

The revival of 'Gundam' and the current boom in sales of plastic models is also due to this age group." In addition to broadening the domestic appeal of 'Gundam', the various videogame spin-offs have also helped the series to secure a strong foothold in overseas markets. The original 3D title based on the period of the One Year War sold more than 1,200,000 copies, for example. Not bad given the limited penetration of the anime at the time.

But these new fan bases of older and overseas audiences, do bring with them a certain number of difficulties for those charged with the creation of new 'Gundam' videogames. Given the complexity of the 'Gundam' universe, it should come as no surprise that it has given rise to a particularly pedantic element among its following. "It is such a deep world with so

Edge recommends

There's far too many giant robot inspired videogames to provide a comprehensive list, but here is a selection of noteworthy super robot videogames:



Armored Core 3
PlayStation2
From Software
In-house



Dai-2-Ji Super Robot Taisen Alpha
PlayStation2
Banpresto
In-house



Bangai-O
Dreamcast
Swing! Entertainment
Treasure



Front Mission 3
PSone
Square
In-house



MechWarrior 4: Vengeance
PC
Microsoft Game Studios
FASA



likely to sustain the enormous domestic interest in 'Gundam' videogames for the immediate future. But it's also an example of the two-way process that exists between videogames and their anime source material – as Inagaki-san points out: "I think that we can now make games with no reference to the original story, developing parallel storylines. That is why *UniversalCentury.net Gundam Online* is interesting because it provides new possibilities inside the 'Gundam' world. You actually live inside it."

Indeed one recent trend characteristic of the super robot genre has been a renewed interest in older series such as 'Mazinger Z.' Although in some ways this is a comparable

Further reading

'The Anime Encyclopedia: A Guide to Japanese Animation since 1917', Jonathan Clements & Helen McCarthy
'The Anime Movie Guide: Movie-By-Movie Guide to Japanese Animation Since 1983', Helen McCarthy
'The Complete Anime Guide: Japanese Animation Video Directory & Resource Guide', Trish Ledoux, Doug Ranney, Fred Patten
'Manga Manga: The World of Japanese Comics', Frederik L. Schodt
'Samurai from Outer Space: Understanding Japanese Animation', Antonia Levi
www.absoluteanime.com
www.rightstuf.com/resource/resource.shtml

"In some ways this is a comparable phenomenon to the western revival of superheroes like Spider-Man and Hulk, it's also a due to the synergies between videogames and the super robot genre"

many characters and robots, with such dramatic scenarios, that it is difficult to find common ground," continues Inagaki-san. "If you consider 100 people, you can't satisfy all of them. It is impossible. My latest game, *Meguriai Sora*, is focused on the origin of the saga, about the One Year War. But I thought it would be very fun to make available via download other Gundam to fight during this time. So I prepared Wing Gundam and God Gundam [known in the west as Burning Gundam] for download. My idea was to have something you could enjoy via download for a bit of fun, to ask 'what would have happened during that war if such machines were available?' But we had criticism from people who were angry with us because we were messing with the Gundam timeline. I was stunned. Yes, it is messing with the timeline – but just for fun!"

Hopefully, the fans will be more forgiving of Bandai's next videogame 'Gundam' project. The forthcoming MMRPG is a massively ambitious undertaking. "The object of the MMRPG is to have a realistic and detailed 'Gundam' universe up and running in a server," explains Shindo-san.

"People can do practically whatever they want to: they can pilot robots or board spaceships – you want to be a journalist? Well you can be. It is Japan's *Ultima Online*, and in that sense it is different from *EverQuest* or *FFXI*."

With the initial beta test drawing to a close, it's more than

phenomenon to the western revival of superheroes like Spider-Man and Hulk, it's also a due to the unique synergies that exist between videogames and the super robot genre. There are currently two videogame versions of 'Tetsuwan Atom' in development, for example, while Bandai Visual has recently produced remakes of 'Mazinger' and 'Getta Robo.' Indeed the latter is a direct result of the influence of videogames, according to Morimoto-san.

Specifically, he cites the influence of Banpresto's Super Robot Taisen series of strategy games, which pitch mechs from all eras and various animes against each other – a mech version of 'Man vs Beast'. "Thanks to this game, in the past ten years, people in their teens or twenties now know these robots from the distant past. The only robot series they have been able to watch on television were 'Z' and 'ZZ Gundam', then 'V Gundam'. But because of this game, they know about the older super robots even though they have never seen them on TV."

If this is an example of the enduring popularity of the super robot genre, it's also an excellent demonstration of the growing cultural influence of the videogame.

And, who knows, perhaps in coming years we'll see videogame adaptations of these videogame-inspired remakes of classic super robot series.



Mobile Suit Gundam: Federation vs Zeon
PlayStation2
Infogrames
Bandai



Ring of Red
PlayStation2
Konami
In-house



Robotech: Battlecry
PS2, Xbox, GC
TDK Interactive
Vicious Cycle



Tekki
Xbox
Microsoft Game Studios
Capcom



Virtual On Oratorio Tangram
Dreamcast
Sega
In-house


ファミ通
キューブ!
+アドバンス
任天堂新作!!
46ページスクープ大特集!!
ファミ通 PS2!
機動戦士ガンダム めぐりあい宇宙
ファミ通
実況パワフルプロ野球
10
Xbox
Project Gotham Racing 2
カンフーパニック
ソウルキャリバーII
DEAD OR ALIVE
Xtreme Beach Volleyball
どうぶつの森e+
話題の続編大特集!!!
MOTHER 1+2
注目ソフト大紹介!!
Weekly Famitsu TOP30
ファイナルファンタジー・クリスタル クロニクル
モンスターファーム4
ポケモンピンボール ルビー&サファイア
実況パワフルプロ野球10
天外魔境II
カービィのエアライド
Kirby's Airride
ポケモンチャンネル
スーパーマリオアドバンス4
スーパーロボット大戦D
テイルズ オブ シンフォニア
実況パワフルプロ野球10
ドラゴンクエスト
NINJA GAIDEN

Famitsu Forever

'Famitsu' is the world's biggest-selling weekly videogame magazine. **Edge** puts its jealousy to one side to meet the company's leading lights...

Famitsu'. 'Fa-mi-tsu'. Three simple syllables, but more than enough to send shivers up the spine of the archetypal videogame import otaku. Japanophile gamers see the weekly magazine as synonymous with truth, beauty, and the Akihabara way; those who've never held a copy still recognise the name and format from the scanned-in articles that leak onto the web revealing each and every scoop. But 'Weekly Famitsu's position as the world's second most important videogame magazine (just **Edge**'s little joke, you understand) didn't come overnight.

The brand began life in February 1985 as 'Famicom Tsushin', a small section of computer magazine 'LOGIN' devoted to covering games on Nintendo's 8bit Famicom. In June 1986, it was decided that the section was considered popular enough to warrant its own magazine, and the biweekly 'Famicom Tsushin' was delivered onto news-stands for the first time.

Long time 'Famitsu' reader, and Japanese correspondent for **Edge**, **Christophe Kagotani** remembers his first encounter with videogame journalism: "I was living in France, and my friends back in Japan were excited about so many games I'd never heard of. It was so frustrating. But one day, one of my uncles in Japan sent me a magazine – *the* magazine. He knew nothing about videogames and nothing about computers, but when he went to the bookstore and asked for a videogame magazine he was advised that there was only one to consider: 'Famicom Tsushin'.

"The magazine seemed so full of information, of energy – I can still feel the excitement. The pages were filled with screenshots of incredible games, ads and small pictures of the hardware. I spent time compiling and editing a shopping list for my next trip to Japan, and when I came back, my suitcase was full of games and, yes, more magazines. But 'Famicom Tsushin' was still the best. I cherished the copies I had for so long. It was the only link left with the Japanese videogame kingdom. I read them so many times..."

High demand born from that kind of obsession led to 'Famicom Tsushin' shifting to a weekly production run in July 1991, and in 1996 it was retitled 'Weekly Famitsu'. Enterbrain became an autonomous company in April 2000 and now employs over 500 people and, amongst other concerns, publishes the four magazines featured in this article, with its flagship title, 'Weekly Famitsu', reaching around 800,000 readers.

Continued


'Famitsu's headquarters in leafy Sangenjaya, south-west Tokyo

Hirokazu Hamamura

Edge meets Enterbrain's president and the Famitsu editorial board chief editor…



Let's begin with the beginning…

What you know as Enterbrain used to be part of a larger group named ASCII. It all began with a magazine named 'Monthly ASCII', founded by a man named Kazuhiko Nishi. He allowed his employees creative freedom, and thought that, as far as computers were concerned, anything was possible. So we suggested a videogame division. He had no interest in entertainment but let us do it. We had a vision of digital entertainment we wanted to explore further.

Was that difficult in the early days?

It was hard. Back in those days, there were three or four magazines, 'Family Computer' magazine, 'Famicom Hisshobon' and 'Marukatsu Famicom'. The most successful was 'Family Computer' magazine, selling more than a million copies a week. We began as a corner inside a monthly magazine called 'LOGIN', so by the time we decided to make 'Famicom Tsushin' a separate magazine we were quite late on the market. It took a hell of a lot of time and energy to develop our sales.

What was the reason behind 'Famitsu's success?

I think that half of the reason was our hard work and our decisions, but the other half is because of the failure of our competitors. At that time, the market was made up of 90 per cent Famicom owners, and many of them bought a second platform such as the PC Engine or the Mega Drive. Our competitors started to release separate, single-format magazines such as 'PC Engine Fan', 'PC Engine' magazine, 'Famicom' magazine and many others. We believed that videogame fans would prefer to have all the news inside a single magazine. We were aware that having other hardware in a magazine called 'Famicom Tsushin' would sound rather strange. But when we considered the origins of our magazine when it was still part of 'LOGIN', a games section in a computer magazine, it sounded logical. Besides, the meaning of Famicom had a broader meaning to us, a word to designate all the consoles on the market, so we went multiplatform. Our competitors split their sales across many magazines, whereas we kept ours in a single publication.



Hamamura-san believes that 'Famitsu's success is down to hard work, good decision-making and the failure of its competitors

Do those differences in culture extend to developers? Are there many differences between Japan and the overseas videogame markets?

It's increasingly clear that developers worldwide are focused on the US market. Japan used to be the focal point of their attention, but now the US represents more than half of the world videogame market, so I think software houses are nervous about failing to appeal to the US. The creators themselves still want to appeal to the Japanese. So you get a blend, which we find in current game releases. They start in Japan and then go outside – hits in Japan find themselves sold on the other markets around the world.

"You also have sites that just take our pages and scan them without asking our permission. They don't even check if our news is true or not. They just scan. You can't call that journalism"

As the market developed and we passed from the Nintendo era to the PlayStation, were you tempted to change the name of the magazine?

Yes, it was a possibility, on many occasions. 'Famicom Tsushin' had been multiplatform for a while, but when we saw the PlayStation coming we noticed people were calling our magazine not 'Famicom Tsushin' but 'Famitsu'. So we abbreviated our name to its current form.

Now that you are at the top of a group, do you still have any close involvement in the magazine's production?

I try to stay in touch with the readers. I still have a column at the end of the magazine and I do a few cross reviews sometimes. But I leave most of the magazine to its editor-in-chief, and that gives me more freedom. Videogames are this incredible culture I discovered at some point in my life. I still have much to learn from them, and while I manage Enterbrain, I still keep involved.

'Famitsu' is a videogame magazine so, in theory, it's targeted at a limited audience. However, looking at the sales figures, 'Famitsu' appears more like a massmarket magazine. Do you think videogames are well accepted in Japanese society?

Yes, indeed. I think the Japanese have a very different approach to new forms of information. The US is so big that things spread slowly. In Japan, people gather quite quickly around one thing, create a phenomenon, and sometimes forget it just as quickly as they discovered it. It's true that 'Famitsu's sales point towards it being a massmarket magazine, but the culture is so different between here and the west that it's difficult to make any meaningful comparison.

But does it work the other way round? Some say that the *GTAIII* phenomenon indicates that overseas creators are starting to take the lead on the Japanese. Do you think that this is the case?

I think that newer ideas tend to come from the west. Initially, US creators came out with the concept of the RPG and the simulation, and Japanese creators refined these concepts to run on home videogame consoles. They made them successful but, concerning concept, I think that US creators are superior. In Japan, there's this tendency to make the same thing that everyone else does, and it becomes a vicious circle. Overseas, there seems to me more emphasis on making your game different from everyone else's.

Look at *Dragon Quest* or *Final Fantasy*, the result of hard work from creators who had their inspiration from outside ideas. I think there are many of these creators in Japan who can produce brilliance from others' ideas. It helps that, for a long time, developers overseas did not see the consoles as a real gaming platform and remained focused on computers, leaving consoles for the kids. In Japan, consoles have always been at the very core of the gaming community, and that is why there are more Japanese creators on consoles, why most of the hits have been traditionally developed in Japan.

GTAIII's core concept was the high level of freedom given to the player. It's a very popular idea in the west. We don't yet know how that will translate to Japan, but now more and more game creators overseas are coming to the consoles, we are reaching a point when the competition between Japan and overseas is becoming very interesting. The time when Japan made the consoles and the games to sell them is over, and a new area of broader cooperation is about to start, where games have no distinct nationality, and creators work together all over the world. This is very exciting to me.



How do you manage to keep 'Famitsu's sales lead in Japan?

It's not easy. But there is one rule which will never change. 'Famitsu' is about multiformat gaming. PlayStation, GameCube, Dreamcast, GBA, whatever, you name it. I believe gaming is going to invade every aspect of our life, that it will be present on our mobile phones and our car navigation systems. 'Famitsu' will cover these, as it already covers a large number of subjects. It is more about gaming as a lifestyle in 'Famitsu', not dedication to a format. And if you need that detail, we have the other magazines in the group like 'Famitsu PS2' or 'Famitsu Xbox'. I don't think our lead will weaken anytime soon.

How do you define your relationship with game developers? Who leads, and who follows?

I think there are two kinds of game: the ones you promote, and the ones that promote you. *Dragon Quest* didn't begin as a multi-million selling franchise, nor did *Final Fantasy*. You have to cultivate a feeling among your readers that this is something interesting. The developers then refine those games to a point where they sell in great numbers, and this drives your sales with it. It's cooperation that defines the relationship between the press and publishers in Japan. Independently of this, you find the cross review. In the entire history of 'Famitsu', we've almost never had to change a cross review because of a developer. If the reviewer disagrees with the developer's concerns, he will not change his review, and we will publish it as it is.

What do you think about the overseas videogame press? Online news sites are very popular in the west – can you see them superseding print journalism?

The press in the west is very… free. I believe there is no close cooperation, or desire to have any, with the game makers. In addition, there's more conflict between magazines and publishers in the west. We have our own problems, but the concept of promoting a game together is stronger. I'm often surprised how quickly news breaks overseas, too – probably because there is no close relationship with publishers in the news delivery process. Obviously this has its good points, but also has negative consequences.

As for the web, many say it is the enemy of magazines, but I don't see it like this – the web is more about lifestyle. As I said before, if games come to mobile phones, we have to be on it. The game industry is changing, but more than that users' lifestyles are changing. We've followed these changes for years, and you can see that in the pages of 'Famitsu'. But the web is quicker for retrieving the latest news and if this becomes the standard, well, the web will become the main tool for getting information. However, in the case of overseas web pages, I think there is too much irresponsibility. As well as unchecked rumours, you also have tons of sites that just take our pages and scan them without asking our permission. I think this is a shame. They don't even check if our news is true or not. They just scan. You can't call that journalism.

Do you have any interesting experiences in your career that you could share with us?

Well, when the PlayStation was in development, I met Mr Kutaragi. At the time, Super Famicom was supreme, and Mr Kutaragi brought me this new machine – I think it was the very first time the machine was revealed. You have to remember that Super Famicom was very big and Sony had very little experience in development. Sony Music was making some games, but they weren't selling well. Now, even if your machine has the Sony label on it, if there's no content your chances of success are less than slim. And with Nintendo so far in front and preparing a new machine, and Sega too, that left Sony in the middle… I thought it would be impossible. Of course, the hardware was impressive, this superb T-Rex walking onscreen, but I still wasn't convinced. Then Kutaragi-san came to visit, and told me with confidence that this machine was going to rule the videogame industry! I asked him why he was so sure. And all he said was, "Come on, we're Sony!" I was impressed by his confidence, but the biggest surprise for me was that everything happened the way he told me it would.

In your long career in the videogame industry has there been one particular episode or event which simply took your breath away?

Not particularly, because there is always something that surprises me. When I thought Nintendo would rule the game industry forever, Sony came and changed everything. I never thought Square would go to Sony. When I thought that the Game Boy was finished, *Pokémon* pushed it to new heights. There are always surprises.

How do you see the future of the videogame press in Japan?

If I'm being optimistic, digital entertainment to come will see the border between movies, music and sport disappear. For example, on a music CD you get videos, with realtime camera angle options, so you can switch among them to get different situations or reactions. When watching sport on television, there's software which allows the download of data in realtime with a live match in progress. I think that anything you can enjoy on a screen is a game in essence. So there is lot of room for a videogame magazine – or let's say a digital entertainment magazine – which is prepared to develop and evolve.

Now, if I have to be a little negative, magazines which remain focused on their core subject may find their days are numbered. I think your real enemy is the hardcore game fan himself. If you put all your attention on making small changes in the review or strategy guide sections of your magazine, you remain in the past. If videogame fans go to the mobile phone, then you have to be present on the mobile phone. If you think the web is your enemy, then it is over. If users adopt the internet, then you need to change the magazine to follow the news about the internet.

Cross interviews

Edge adopts 'Famitsu's Cross Review format, and takes four of Enterbrain's editors to task about Japanese magazine culture, and the differences between gaming publications here and overseas…

Bakataal Kato (Katsuaki Kato)



Katsuaki Kato is editor-in-chief of 'Weekly Famitsu', Japan's biggest-selling videogame magazine. "We have enough employees to make eight soccer teams!" he claims. "But you must understand that we have to produce an issue every week." The hectic schedule means Kato-san spends around a dozen nights a month sleeping at the office. At the moment his two favourite games are Konami's *Winning Eleven 7* and its baseball sim *Powerful Proyakyu*.

Tada Chobin (Takuji Tada)



Takuji Tada is editor-in-chief of 'Famitsu PS2'. "We can make two soccer teams from our staff," says Takuji-san, who, much to his company's chagrin, doesn't spend any nights sleeping at the office, preferring to cycle the ten minutes it takes to get home. He plays a lot of *Final Fantasy XI*. "It is like a drug to me," he says. "When you start, it is difficult to stop." Takuji-san's character on *FFXI* has logged around 150 days of playtime.

Koji Aizawa (Koji Aizawa)



Koji Aizawa is editor-in-chief of 'Famitsu Xbox'. "We have 11 employees, so we can just make one soccer team," says Aizawa-san. "No substitutes, though," he adds, before revealing that he's too ashamed to tell **Edge** the name of the 'simulation' game he's currently playing. "It's nothing erotic!" His favourite thing about his job is his magazine's internet forum, which is full of videogame fanatics.

Mizupin (Yuichi Mizuma)



Yuichi Mizuma is editor-in-chief of 'Famitsu Cube + Advance'. "We've had reports of kids sleeping with our magazine under their pillow," states Mizuma-san proudly. Addicted to *Pokémon Pinball* and *Kirby's Air Ride*, he delights in the fact that he only has to sleep at the office three days a month. It's not all roses at the Nintendo magazine, though. "We can't play soccer," laments the understaffed editor, "But we can enjoy baseball with our nine employees!"

In the UK, 'Famitsu' is perceived as a magazine for true hardcore gamers, the place where dedicated videogame fans go for gaming information. Who is the typical reader of your magazine? How would you describe your readership?

Half are secondary school and high school students, and the other half are all kinds of people: university students, salarymen and so on. 'Famitsu' is in the top five of magazines read by male college students, although when you arrive at the end of high school, the numbers do start to decline. But the magazine still reaches a wide audience. In essence, people who like games read 'Famitsu'. Female readers count for around ten per cent.

You know *Kingdom Hearts*? Well, that's very popular with the female audience, and we just started to put a manga inside our magazine based on that licence. Thanks to that, our female audience share is rising. It represents around 20 per cent, and even rises up to 25 per cent sometimes! The age of our readership is similar to 'Weekly Famitsu'. There is one peak in secondary school and high school and another one with salarymen and their wives.

People who read my magazine are a little older, actually. They tend to be between 20 and 30. For a videogame magazine it is quite a high average, because the Xbox market is mainly dominated by young adults. Around 97 per cent of them are male and, of course, 99 per cent of my readers own an Xbox. The remaining people are considering buying one. Xbox has not been very successful in Japan, so there are many videogame fanatics among my readers.

Since my magazine is dedicated to the GameCube and Game Boy Advance, the audience is younger. Schoolchildren represent around 50 per cent of our readership. Another 30 per cent are junior high school students, and around ten per cent are their parents! Because the audience is so young, there is no real difference between male or female users – they all play. Maybe around 60 per cent of them are male, the rest female.

Edge begins work at 9.30am sharp, and – particularly on deadline week – days can often continue into nights and early mornings, a heady mix of phonecalls, writing, and tears of blood. What's a typical day like in your position on your magazine?

We start at 11am. Well, that's if I manage to arrive at 11am, of course. I then spend some time checking my emails, then my schedule for the day, because I usually have appointments until late every night. Sometimes, I have to leave the office to do some reportage, but I spend most of my time managing the magazine from my desk. I also write a little for the magazine, so I mustn't forget my column…

We also start at 11am, and my day is much like the others'. I check my emails first, and appointments fill much of my time. Above all of this I have to manage the magazine from my desk as well. Actually, the first thing I do each morning is switch on my PlayStation2 and log in to *FFXI*. I can't spend much time on the game, but I can't work without having the game screen running beside me.

Although every division has the freedom to set its own rules, we also start the day at 11am. I travel a lot so I go to the office after an early appointment, and during an average month, around half of my evenings are spent with game makers. Today, I went to Microsoft in the morning, and then returned here for a game tournament we organised. After this interview I'm going to Tecmo, and then for some reportage in another place.

I feel a little guilty, but my day is much more relaxed! To be honest, there is not that much to do! I don't go outside much – we basically start at 11am like everyone else but I usually arrive at the office around 1pm. Then I play games, and spend my time thinking about what features and free gifts to include in the next issue. Later I arrange meetings to see how we can get these bonuses.

'Weekly Famitsu' is an institution, and benefits from a dominant position. Besides the fact that 'Famitsu Xbox' also benefits from being the only Xbox magazine in Japan, is the 'Famitsu' image an advantage, just as the official licences prove to be in the UK?

Since we are the biggest videogame magazine in Japan, scoops come almost naturally, without trying. Game developers come to us to have their games covered in our pages. In a certain sense, our work is made easier, but having scoops is not all bright, because there is some responsibility that comes with it. You are responsible for introducing the game to users and, in doing so, justifying the faith of the developer in your ability.

'Weekly Famitsu' is certainly an institution, and brings its reputation to many of the other magazines in the group. And we can differentiate ourselves by providing more coverage of PlayStation2 games compared to 'Weekly Famitsu', which has a limited number of pages. Even though we have 'PS2' in the title we are not an official magazine. But who cares? Readers are not bothered by that sort of thing, and just buy their favourite magazine.

We don't have official licences – that sort of thing has no use in Japan – and that means that people are gathering around the magazine whose title they recognise. There are no demo discs like overseas, either, though they were tried during the PlayStation era. Enterbrain tried it too, again unofficially. Every publication has to gather the demo or video from makers and build their own disc, very different to overseas.

We do not suffer much. We found, from a study, that GC owners were mostly made of elementary school students, and until us, videogame magazines didn't sell well – or at all – among this particular audience. So we designed our magazine to meet that target, adding free gifts inspired by popular manga magazines. We were successful – we have about three competitors but people who read our magazine don't read another one, even 'Weekly Famitsu'.

In the UK, videogame magazines are very specialised, and target themselves at a niche audience. Looking at sales figures alone in Japan, the magazines appear to be true mass media. Are videogames better accepted in Japanese society?

Japan is quite a small country and people like to do the same thing, so initial popularity made videogames even more popular, creating a massmarket phenomenon. The people who enjoyed Famicom games are now adults and most still play – it is standard to have one console in a house. But still, we're a long way from being accepted as a cultural or social item. The mass media has no real understanding of the videogame, often just portraying the negatives.

I would like to return to a point made by Kato-san. People who enjoyed Famicom years ago are now adults. Many of them have children, too, and they are in their sixth year of elementary school now. The fact that they play videogames at home is nothing surprising. It's becoming more and more standard, and I think that in ten years from now it will be completely normal for whole households to play videogames.

Japan has around double the UK population, nearly 130m. 'Weekly Famitsu' sells around 800,000 copies each week. You can find the magazine in many places, next to mass media manga magazines or bedside books. If you have to make a comparison with the UK, videogames in Japan would have the same place as music or sport inside society. And like music and sport, you find a core population of fanatics, too. Some may be classified as 'hooligans'!

Since my magazine is for the youth, it is even more specialised. We write a lot about the Game Boy Advance too, which is a 'young' format, as is the GameCube, mostly elementary school. There is less trouble with acceptance among their peers, because they are all children – but still it is useless to introduce a young adult game to such an audience. We also have to adapt the tone of our reviews to meet their needs.

Edge's marking system means that barely a month goes by without some threat from a publisher or developer over a sub-seven score. Is it the same for 'Famitsu'? Are you free to write what you want, or do you ever have to change editorial in the face of external pressure?

Yes, we experience pressure, asking us to put an emphasis on one part of the game, but we won't change anything in a review. Then we can be threatened to have pages of adverts dropped from the magazine but I just don't care. You want to drop the ad pages? Be my guest! Reviewers or writers are separated from the ad department, so they never know about what's going on with advertising.

If you compromise your reviews, then the magazine loses most of its meaning. Of course, we print corrections and such if we make errors, for example if we get the title wrong, or game modes or other details. But as for the critical content, nothing is changed. This is our policy, and we have to protect it. We've never even changed our reviews for the games made by our own company, Enterbrain! They were not very pleased!

We show developers the articles before going to print, and they check for errors. We change things when details are wrong but as for the meaning, nothing is ever changed. If it seems we have a close relationship with developers it's true, but with regards to the cross review, there is no negotiation. That is where the red line of journalism is drawn. We only show them the article before printing in order to be sure our coverage is accurate.

Of course we have pressure, but concerning the reviews we have no order to follow the publisher's recommendations. We are totally free in what we want to write. I do remember the issue to which Tada-san refers, when we gave an Enterbrain game a bad review. We were called in to see the CEO of the company, but the review was not changed.

While 'Famitsu' is idolised by the UK otaku, few people know what Japanese people think of western gaming magazines. What do you think about overseas videogame media, and how does it differ from the publications that you work on?

I went to the UK and I wore a 'Famitsu' t-shirt. So many journalists asked me for my t-shirt – whoa, they knew about 'Famitsu'! I realised they must 'read' it. When you start playing videogames in Japan, there is a big probability that the very first magazine you buy is 'Famitsu', and I think that magazines help newcomers to get more involved in this hobby. Overseas, videogame magazines seem to cater for hardcore gamers.

I was very surprised by **Edge**. It looks very stylish and cool, different from the other overseas magazines. In Japan there have been a few attempts to produce a similar magazine, but they all failed. I'm so happy that one such magazine succeeded, even though in Japan such a magazine has very little hope. I would feel not ashamed to read **Edge** on the train, while I would feel uneasy with 'Famitsu'. The image is radically different.

What I find interesting is the way **Edge** has published early information about the Xbox and GBA, giving ideas of how the console may be. We could not do that in our magazine. 'Weekly Famitsu' has tons of scoops but they are all officially provided by developers and publishers. We hear a lot and we know tons of rumours and secrets, but we can't write about them. With regards to what **Edge** does, I feel half envious and half impressed.

We simply could not make a magazine like **Edge**. I mean as a company, but especially us, with our Nintendo audience. But even though we make a magazine for young children, almost exactly the opposite of what **Edge** does, we ourselves are adults, and our designers buy **Edge** every month so as not to forget their designers' soul!



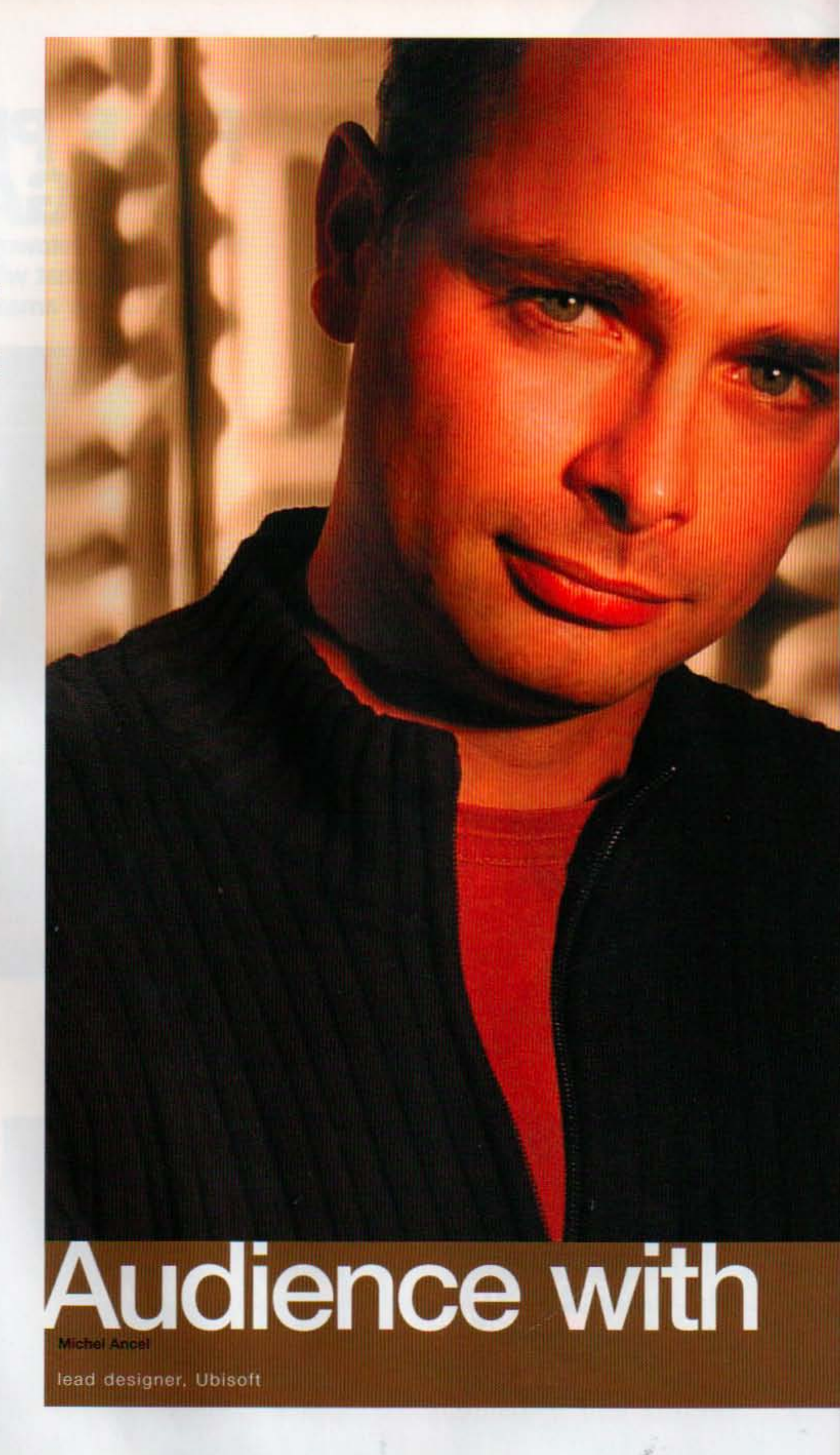






The next dimension

Michel Ancel made his name with the creation of limbless hero Rayman. Having grown up fascinated by videogames, his early efforts to create ingenious puzzle games drew attention from his friends and professionals alike. At the age of 17 he entered and won a short animation competition, which led Ubisoft to take him on as a graphic designer. Six years later, in 1995, *Rayman* was released for the PlayStation. Striking a vibrant contrast to some of the sludgy early releases for the console, the game has continued to attract phenomenal sales throughout a variety of budget incarnations. A new team took over the franchise after *Rayman 2*, and Ancel and his team embarked on the ambitious project which would become *Beyond Good & Evil* (see p104).



Audience with

Michel Ancel

lead designer, Ubisoft



Is there still a place in gaming for 2D?
I have been very impressed by *Viewtiful Joe*, because even if you have the camera angles and things, it's still a 2D game. Personally, I think the massmarket doesn't care if it's in 3D or 2D. We still are making games for the GBA, so we still have 2D development teams. But if you don't have impressive technology then the magazines will say "this is the old kind of gaming" even if the idea is incredible. So it's very hard to convince publishers as they are thinking as sellers. They look at games like you look at an apple – if looks good, big and red then they don't really care if it's bad inside because it's something that will sell well.

And, these days, 2D is not a good apple – it's like a little home-grown village apple. But that doesn't mean there is no place for it. It's part of the contrast with 3D sequences, it's a part of the language. It depends on the gameplay – in *Warcraft* you can have some 3D angles, but I think people prefer the top down view – it's very practical. That's how they play the best. The 3D is cosmetic, it's very visual, it's to impress the friend standing behind you, but when the friend has gone away you go back to 2D! And when you look at *MGS2* – which is a very movie-like kind of game, maybe a bit too much – but you are always looking at the 2D map. That's very funny, because you can play nearly the whole game in 2D, like a Spectrum game! 2D is still a source of a special kind of gameplay. And sometimes for the player it's: "Wooooo! Okay, I don't have to worry about the camera, just about what I need to do."

With the release of games like *Project Gotham Racing 2* it seems the quest for graphical realism is close to being completed. Will attention turn instead to more stylistic games?
When people ask me this question, I say realism is not a style. In the movies realism is easy, because you just point your camera at it, but you still have a lot of different styles. Sometimes you have visual treatment, like the Coen brothers' movies. It's realistic but there are some subtle things that are applied to reality. 'The Matrix' is a kind of enhanced reality – that's the purpose of the movie.

The next big games could be realistic, but they could also be stylistically inventive. It's one of the reasons I think *Viewtiful Joe* is so interesting, so brave. I hope the market is open to this kind of game – it's always the same when you talk to publishers, they reject stylised things and they want to be immersed in realism. And because of that trend there is this big hole to be filled. Everyone is going in the same direction, towards realism, and suddenly everyone will understand that there is inertia in these things. People will just play realistic things for three years, and then when something new comes along they will say "Oh! That's something new!" And maybe *Viewtiful Joe* is here for that. Maybe it's too early, maybe it's on time, I don't know. But there is no question that all the publishers follow trends, because there was no *GTA* kind of game before *GTA*, and now everyone is going in that direction. Publishers just follow the trend until one of them crashes and then everyone is – eeeek – trying to brake and turn.

Ubisoft has a line up of very strong, original IP this year. Is it trying to turn that corner ahead of the pack?
I don't want to defend my publisher, but our titles are different. We have *XIII* which is different and *Prince of Persia* which is different and *Beyond Good & Evil* which is different again. Ubisoft is taking risks, so after this year I know there will be big decisions taken, depending on how these kinds of games sell. Of course, if you go to Yves Guillemot, the CEO, and say: "I'm going to make a *GTA* game – only better!" he'll give you the money and there's no problem. Of course he will ask you: "Just how are you going to manage that?" because he knows that it's not so easy, but he'll have no problem with the proposal. If you ask him to make *BG&E2*, and say: "Oh, I've got some new ideas. I think we could increase the role of the journalist," he'll say: "Umm... yes... okay... well." So we've had a lot of meetings to be sure we're focusing on the right market, but it wasn't so strategic from the outset. I think the main strategy is having different games for different people.

"The 3D is cosmetic, it's very visual, it's to impress the friend standing behind you, but when the friend has gone away you go back to 2D!"

Game development is becoming a truly global industry. Do you expect to see more regional diversity?

Oh! That's a very good question, because I am a bit tortured about this sort of thing. I'm not sure, because all the publishers are connected. They look at what the others are doing and copy the styles, so things could get more the same. But in this game we tried to manage a mix of these things – it has very European architecture, for instance. In fact, we got a message from Sony of America saying, "Your game looks very European." That was all. No comments.

We thought "What do you mean?" [laughs]. I expected to see "... which could be a problem in America" on the end. But press people and US magazines seem to like it.

I think for me this game is very reminiscent of Jules Verne, that mix of the past and the future. The cities are very European and one is modelled on Venice. There are no big buildings, and so some of the American people might see it as a way to do some travelling, but some of them won't recognise the world, so they won't like it. We've tried to keep a European flavour in there.

For the next game – this is why I said I was tortured – we will ask this question sincerely. Do we have to see the big skyscrapers when we don't live in towns like that? In my office, the graphic artists aren't capable of drawing a wall without doing a bit of detail, a bit of it falling off. They just can't do something flat and American. They love this stuff [he points to Jade dangling from a beautifully moulded architrave] this is their world and their life. So, for the next game, we'll have to think about what we want to do.

The problem is that if you make a game for the American market it tends to sell well all over the world. But if you sell well in Europe, there's no guarantee that you'll sell in America or Japan. So, personally, I'm very confident in the fact that we can sell enough just in Europe. That's what we did with *Rayman* and *Rayman 2*, which sold more than 9m copies just in Europe. For this game if we just sell 1m or 2m that's okay for me. When we set the budget for the project we did it with that kind of projection. But now, even in Europe, we haven't been getting a lot of coverage, so [pulls face] now we are just waiting for the people. Like with *Rayman*, we are waiting for the people.

Game-making is developing ever-closer ties with the film industry. Is this something you support?

What I try to do is take people from the film industry, and then to teach them what videogames are. It's not that I will work with people from the movie industry to integrate FMV, or whatever, it's about taking what you need. I think the movie industry had to take a lot of experience from photographers, and the photographers have taken a lot from painters.

"The next games will have more impressive sequences, because we've learned a lot about how to integrate emotions within the game without cutting away"

Every new medium has to have an interest in looking at the previous one, then you don't just have people's experience for ten years, you have all the experience that people have had in creating images for 1,000 years, maybe. Why close the door?

We didn't want to make a movie – none of us is a frustrated movie director. We've got one hour of realtime cinematics, but we did not use FMV because we wanted the transitions to be very smooth. I think the next games will have more impressive sequences, because, through the cut-scenes, we've learned a lot about how to integrate emotions within the game without cutting away.

I think the movie industry is teaching us interesting things about visual language, but that's all. And sound, of course.

But it's not about tools, it's not about content. It's about the language, about how to make people understand a situation, using certain tricks of the camera and things, but it stops at that point.



The extraordinary success of *Rayman* was partly due to its glorious visuals. It's hard to think of an early PlayStation game that has aged as well

Were there changes made to *Beyond Good & Evil* in response to the reaction of people at E3?

Not in response to the gamers, because – just to tell you – nobody was playing the game!

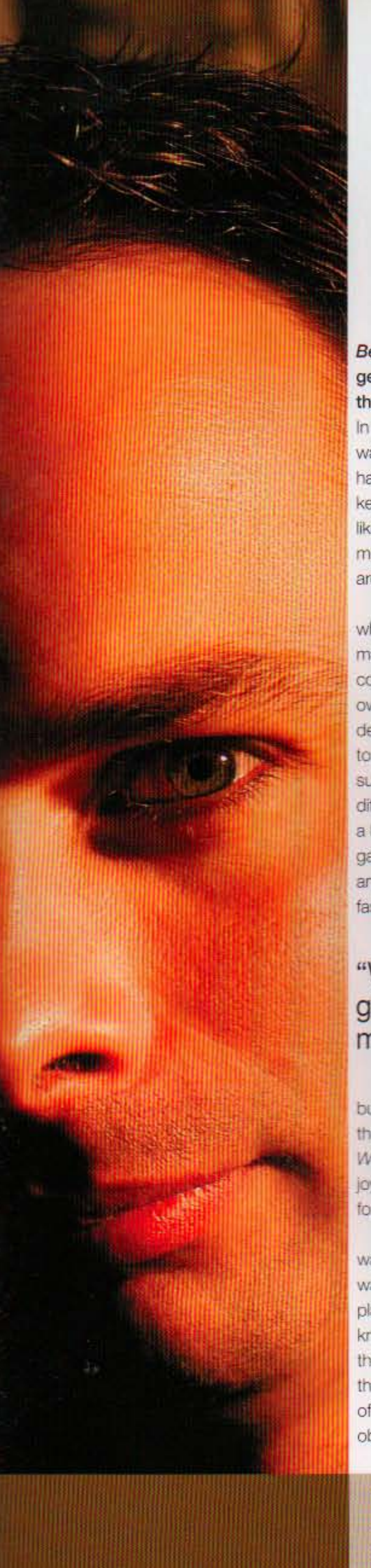
Well, not nobody, because some did, but during E3 people didn't care about it, they don't know the name, there's no licence, it's not based on a movie. And I think there was an error in the marketing. They called it The Michel Ancel Game, but nobody knows my name! In fact, I told them, don't do this! [Pulls face and squeals.] They thought people would rush to the game, but I said: "No, we have to start everything from scratch, it's new, we have to endure the fact that we have to build a new licence." It's hard.

But at E3 I had the feeling that what I was saying to people about the game, and what they were seeing on the screen, were very different. I was talking about how she's a reporter, she's working for a resistance group, but what they were seeing was a *Jak and Daxter* type of game. So I told marketing we must be careful because people don't understand the game. So we worked on the visuals to make her look a little more mature.

Jade looked like a schoolgirl, how could she be a war reporter? So I decided to change her, and now maybe she's less appealing, but she's more in the role.

And since we wanted to talk about something serious, we had to take care with the dialogue. It's not like *Rayman* where we can do jokes at any time, and we don't really care about the whole game. You think about each gag in ten-minute bits, you don't think about what is going to be built in the mind of the player. And in this game that's what we wanted to do, build the whole game in the mind of the player.





Beyond Good & Evil has had quite a long gestation. Were you influenced by games that had come out over those four years?
In terms of the stealth? Not really, because it was already in the game. As a journalist you have to investigate and get information that is kept very close to your target. Early on it was like in *The Ocarina of Time*, where stealth was more of a minigame – very simple, and if you are seen, then you restart.

Then we moved to a very different thing where you can decide to hide yourself or make diversions, and the AI is far more complicated. It's the best way to create your own gameplay within the game. You really can decide what to do – not to kill, or to snipe, or to attack directly. It's one of the ways we've succeeded in making the game appealing for different kinds of players. Also, we decreased a bit the puzzle and adventure parts of the game, where you have to search for hours and hours. All this was removed – it was old fashioned. So now the game is not too long, but it doesn't have any artificial lengthening of the gameplay. Because even in *The Wind Waker* there are places where you put the joystick like that [pushes imaginary stick forward] and go, *"Zzzzzzzz."*

When I saw *The Wind Waker*, I said I don't want this in our game – because our game was very close to *Zelda*, touring from place to place. We have a lot of maps, but now you know where everything is and you can go there very quickly. The game could have been three times longer just because of these kinds of micro-cinematics. Every time you take an object or call the wind it takes 15 seconds! Of course, it's very good animation, but every time? I don't understand why they did it.

But the one game that really made me afraid was *Ico*. We'd been developing *Beyond Good & Evil* for a year when *Ico* came out.

At that time our game had no fighting in it, you just had a friend who could act independently, which gave you the feeling that he might do things you didn't expect. We wanted the feeling like in *Little Computer People*. *Ico* did that very well.

So we were [whoops with relief] and said: "There are other people trying this kind of thing, so let's continue." So when we saw a year later it had sold nothing, then [pulls face] and now when you say *Ico* to a publisher it's like putting a gun to your own head.

For us, *Ico*'s failure was like a sword in the gut. We had to say: "So, okay, we have to change what we're doing." And Ubisoft were great, they said, "Okay, take another year and a half." Which was crazy, because we were close to the end.

"We changed a lot of things. Many things that made the game better – that strengthened the story, made it more mature, made the gameplay more streamlined and modern"

How did that make you feel? Do you think "Hooray, we've got time to fix things," or, "Ooof, we thought we'd finished?"
It's more the 'ooof' part. It was a big problem. The team thought the game was finished, and they'd invested a lot in it, personally. But when we saw what happened to *Ico*, it gave a lot of power to publishers, and it wasn't the only example of that kind of failure – *Rez* as well, and games like that. So I had to make a decision about whether or not to quit, which is what I wanted to do at the time. I was in the middle, between the team and Ubisoft. All Ubisoft said was, "Be careful." They didn't tell us expressly, "Do that, do this," which was very good. But the team felt the game was finished. No one said anything, but the team was very demoralised. We were working very slowly, and missing milestones. We had all these people saying: 'Make it like *The Matrix*.' But if you try to make it like *The Matrix*, then why would people choose our game? If they want to play *The Matrix* there is already a *Matrix* game! They'll take the original instead!

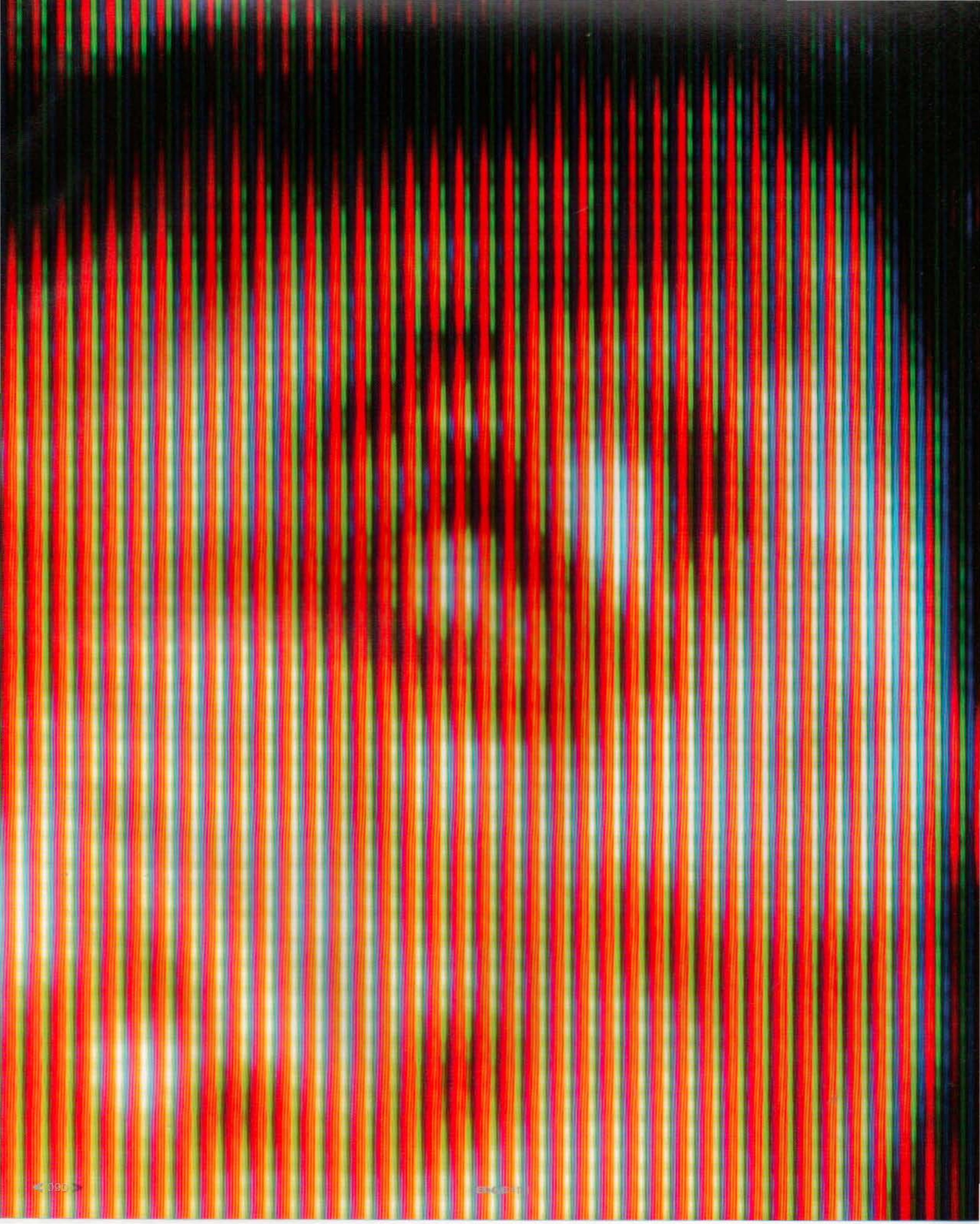
It was a situation where nobody knew what to do. It was a panic.

So I decided to stay, and I said, "Okay, we'll change some things. I'll change the main character, I'll make it less cartoony, because *Ico* was cartoony." We changed lots of things. Many things that made the game better – that strengthened the story, made it more mature, made the gameplay more streamlined and modern. It meant we could make sure we had things to please the hardcore gamers, to make some really ingenious minigames that would be like nothing you have seen before. So we will see how it works out. I said to my team: "We never released *Beyond Good & Evil*. This is *Beyond Good & Evil 2*."



Jade's redesign was not as radical as some reports suggested, but the most obvious change was the more militaristic styling of her clothes





Don't copy that floppy

An internet fad says that piracy's bad, but in 2003 it looks so funny...







"Did I hear you right, did I hear you sayin' / That you're gonna make a copy of a game without payin'? / Come on, guys, I thought you knew better! / Don't copy that floppy!"

'Don't Copy That Floppy,' an educational video intended to teach schoolchildren the perils of software piracy, is eight minutes long. Most of that is a rap, performed by one MC Hart. It was made in 1992, just over a decade ago, but it might as well be a million years for all the cultural and technological relevance it has today.

Sit back, relax, and let Hart's old-skool flow educate: "I'm your MC Double Def DP / That's the Disk Protector for you and the posse / That's your artists, writers, designers and programmers / They pump up the images for games and grammas / That let you learn, but also play / The games you came here for today."

Designed for classroom discussion, the audience for 'Don't Copy That Floppy' should have been limited to teachers and their put-upon kids. But the video's status as this summer's internet craze gave it bigger viewing figures than its backer, America's Software Publishers Association, could ever have hoped. Eleven years late, maybe, but the message was finally out.

"You say 'I'll just make a copy, for me and a friend / Then he'll make one and she'll make one and where will it end? / One leads to another then ten, then more / And no one buys anything from the store / So no one gets paid and they can't make more / The posse breaks up and they close the door / Don't copy! Don't copy that floppy!"

While MC Hart is given a co-writer's credit, **Edge** suspects the majority of the rhyming here comes from the other named lyricist, Ilene Rosenthal. The curious thing is that, while failing to address the root cause of piracy – the commonly perceived overpriced nature of computer software, a trend which continues today – and rendered laughable by time and try-hard cool stylings, much of what Rosenthal says makes sense. "No *Carmen Sandiego*, no more *Oregon Trail* / *Tetris* and the others, they're all gonna fail / Not because we want it but because you're just takin' it / Dis-res-pec-tin' all the folks who are ma-kin' it."

Edge readers spend more per head on videogames than readers of any other publication, but **Edge** suspects that most of the readers of this magazine have dabbled in some form of rights theft at one point or another, be it through old Spectrum compilations, modern-day emulation, GBA flash carts or Dreamcast boot discs. Everyone seems to be capable of drawing their own line in the sand. **Edge** wonders where yours is, and it also wonders how you'd go about explaining your position to children in 2003. 'Don't Copy That Floppy' is ridiculous, but its financially-motivated ambition is ultimately noble – that it's important to invest in things you care about, or those things will cease to exist.

"When you buy a disc, you're sayin' to the team / You respect what you do and what you're workin' for / We'll keep up our support so you can make up some more / We'll do the right thing and the future will be clear / There will be new programs here at the end / Don't copy! Don't copy that floppy!"

Edge's review policy

Every issue, **Edge** evaluates the best, most interesting, hyped, innovative or promising games on a scale of ten, where five naturally represents the middle value. **Edge**'s rating system is fair, progressive and balanced. An average game deserves an average mark – not, as many believe, seven out of ten. Scores broadly correspond to the following sentiments: zero: nothing, one: disastrous, two: appalling, three: severely flawed, four: disappointing, five: average, six: competent, seven: distinguished, eight: excellent, nine: astounding, ten: revolutionary

Edge's most played

Metroid Fusion

If you can find a game that's as superbly paced and structured as this then please tell us about it. And the glorious atmosphere? *Fusion* is the stuff of nightmares.



(Game Boy Advance) Nintendo

The Mark of Kri

In spite of minor control issues, this is a beautifully crafted title. What's more, it can be completed in a weekend – providing a welcome break from deadlines.



(PlayStation2) SCEE

Dark Chronicle

Flawed it may be, but **Edge** has lavished many happy hours on its hair dryer gun and roller-skating robot. And hands off its brand new pith helmet, you hear?



(PlayStation2) SCEE

Freedom Fighters

A little broken in places, certainly, but the sense of atmosphere can often make you overlook some of the game's defects. Engaging, if somewhat limited, stuff.



(Xbox) Electronic Arts

testscreen

The world's most respected videogame reviews

Great expectations

It's official: games are brilliant

Let's talk *Broken Sword III: The Sleeping Dragon* and *Prince of Persia The Sands of Time*, games **Edge** has been following with interest for a while. Both have been presented at press events and trade shows for the last 18 months, and, from what **Edge** has gathered, journalists have been similarly impressed. So why the apathy?

Look around for reviews of these two games. Sixes, sevens, maybe even a few eights out of ten. Faint praise and verdicts with tired disclaimers. "You'll like it if you like this sort of thing." Ho-hum. Conviction is not something you find much in the videogame press these days. It's all the more exasperating when *Enter the Matrix* and *Lara Croft Tomb Raider: The Angel of Darkness* score the same as titles that have been crafted with the care and thoughtfulness of Revolution and Ubisoft's games.

In the bar, away from the hubbub of a show floor, fellow journalists will tell **Edge** that they love the pants off *Prince of Persia*, while *The Angel of Darkness* is a broken mess. A few months later and both get similar ratings. What's going on? Contrary to popular belief videogame journalists do not get bungs. No, there's something more subtle and unthinking behind such discrepancies.

It's you. You are the cause of this perfidious change of heart in the typical game journalist. Take a list of next year's game releases and you'll be able to predict with alarming accuracy the titles that will receive the most attention and acclaim from both the specialist and lifestyle press. Because these are the games they think you'll like. To put it even more bluntly, they think you'll think *MGS3: Snake Eater* is worth nine out of ten, so that's what many will give it. Best not interfere with reader expectation.

As brilliant as *Broken Sword III* and *Prince of Persia* are, they don't fit into any cosy, predictable gamer world view or, perhaps more tellingly, focus the action on blood and guns. There's not much of a 'handle' for a journalist to cling to. Neither ever had a hope of scoring full marks like, say, *Driver 2*. Sadly, the fact that both evolve their respective genres in a stunning new direction is lost.

So: don't be too disheartened about *Mario Kart: Double Dash!!*. Both *Broken Sword III* and *Prince of Persia* exceeded our expectations. We hope they exceed yours.







094



098



100



102



110



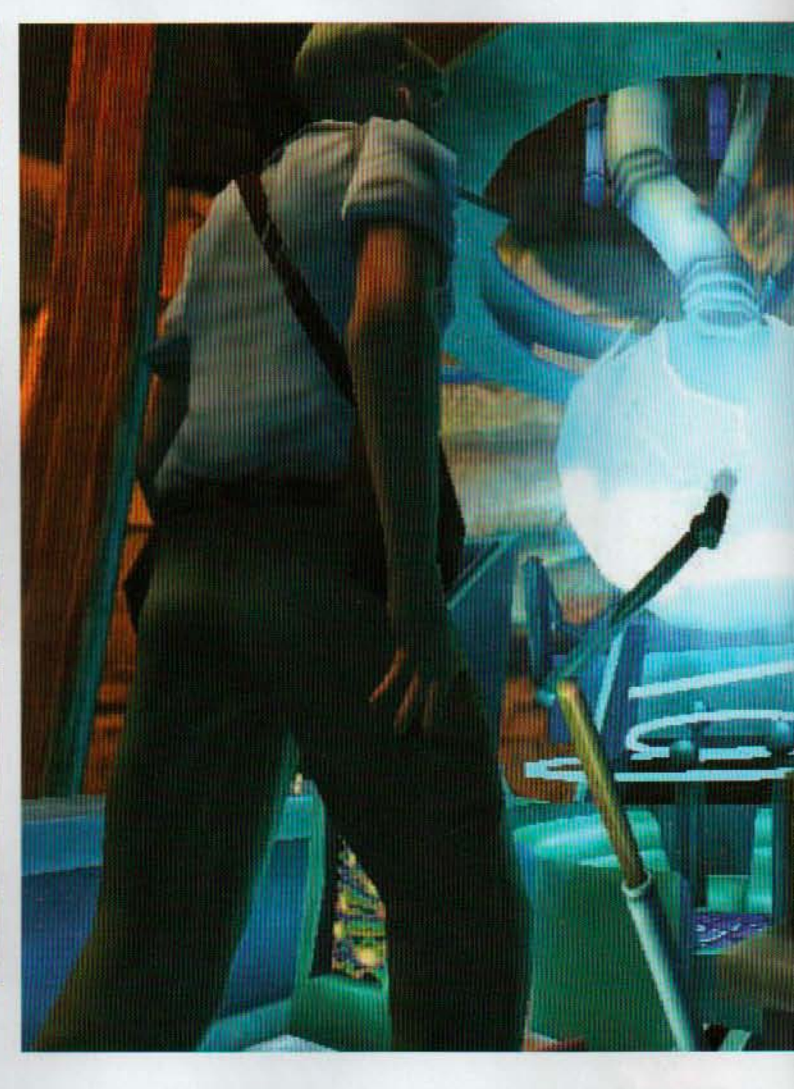
Broken Sword III: The Sleeping Dragon

Format: **Xbox (version tested), PS2, PC** Publisher: **THQ** Developer: **Revolution** Price: **£30** Release: **Out Now**





George and Nico aren't your typical videogame avatars and the *The Sleeping Dragon* is all the better for their well-rounded character design



The unnoticed goes unappreciated. Example: 20 years ago the adventure game, for all its verbal artistry and sophistication, was dying. Why? No-one cared about text any more. The genre would have to adapt to survive, and out of its ashes rose the point 'n' click, a spin on the narrative-led experience that let players forgo their keyboard input in favour of mouse-led journeys around lush paintings. These were the most glorious, sumptuous pieces of software available, their sedate nature allowing developers to illustrate backdrops in glorious detail.

Proving that human nature is a graphics whore at heart, the genre's popularity held in proportion to its aesthetic appeal. People came for the looks, and stayed for the stories, and three companies led the field: Sierra, LucasArts and Revolution.

But just as progressive technology formed the genre, so it would eventually kill it. When faster processors and better consoles allowed developers to manipulate detailed environments in realtime, we all leapt eagerly into three dimensions, mistaking visual depth for physical involvement, and left the static adventure behind. LucasArts chased after the market with *Grim Fandango*, a dark and dazzling pseudo-3D masterpiece that quickly found itself forgotten, buried by more instant thrills. The US company shrugged, and turned its attention to mostly poor – but predictably lucrative – 'Star Wars' titles.

Sierra's franchises offered diminishing returns, and they were consumed by Vivendi.

Revolution? It tried its hand at 3D action-adventure with the awkward *In Cold Blood*. It didn't work out. It slipped away. It slept.

It's like that film, isn't it? The fairytale, the end of act two, where everything seems lost, and you're despairing for the hero, but you know that somehow, secretly, he'll fight back. Because, hell, it can't end like this, it just can't.

"All of Broken Sword's puzzles are logical. It's a rare game that makes players accept their own stupidity. Broken Sword III is it"







While *The Sleeping Dragon*'s visual design is wonderful, much of the beauty comes from the audio effects too, not least the sweeping, score which provides the signature for the game's key moments

Revolution's games – the first two parts of the *Broken Sword* trilogy in particular – bred the kind of devotion that makes comebacks inevitable. It's about the love. People really, really love George Stobbart and Nico Collard.

So, *Broken Sword III: The Sleeping Dragon* is the comeback, Revolution as revolution, a played-straight sequel to a point 'n' click adventure. It contains the same characters, and expects to draw the same audience, but has entirely new technology driving it. That is the first problem Revolution will have encountered, of consistency, and it's one it sidesteps with grace and humour.

The game operates almost identically to its predecessors: players control George or Nico with the left analogue stick, and use an on-screen context-sensitive menu to interact with objects in each environment. Objects that can be manipulated are illustrated by small sparkles. It is a fluid, intuitive interface, and it's to the game's credit that **Edge** didn't even notice the system for a good number of hours. As mentioned above, the unnoticed goes unappreciated.

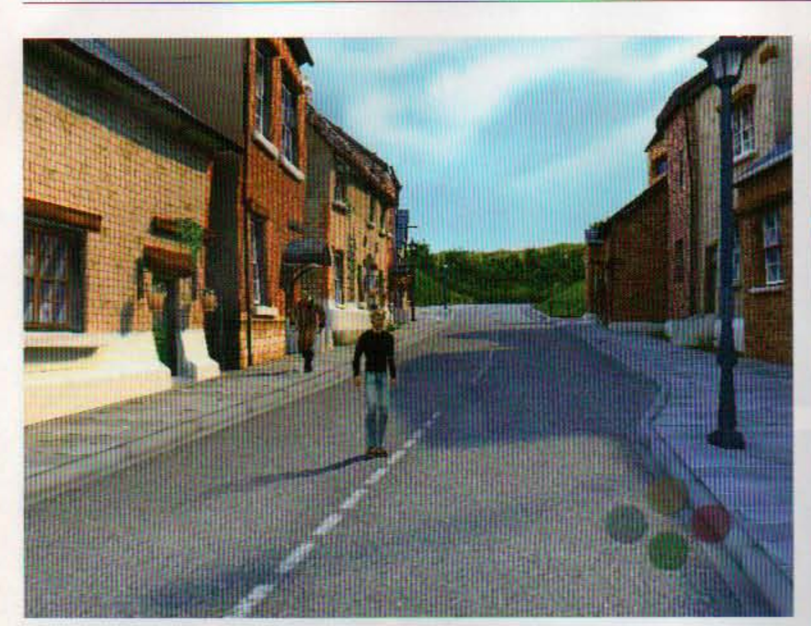
It's difficult, this, treading that fine line that avoids revealing surprises but provides some clue as to the game's breadth. Still, **Edge** tries: players will visit a handful of locations across the world, some of them on several occasions. Each area contains a number of rooms, and most rooms contain a number of interaction points. Some of these points are red herrings, designed to mislead players whose strategy is to use every object in their inventory with every other object. All of *Broken Sword*'s puzzles are logical, and while players will almost certainly find themselves stuck and frustrated at some point during the adventure, discovering the solution will bring them to blame themselves, not the puzzle. It's a rare game that makes players accept their own stupidity. *Broken Sword III* is it.

Perhaps part of that willingness to take the blame comes from a reluctance to denigrate the lead characters. George and Nico are the among the most sympathetic digital creations of all time, and the near-perfect script is delivered with humour and subtlety by a brilliant cast. It's not just what



Box clever

As well as traditional object-oriented puzzles, *Broken Sword III* lets the player indulge in some non-traditional box shifting. Experienced *Boxxle* players will have little difficulty with the challenges, but it's a neat, simple diversion that makes good use of *Broken Sword*'s new 3D environment. Despite that, the irony of a game that does much to defy modern videogaming convention having so much to do with crates is not lost on **Edge**.



Puzzles are logical, but expect a number of moments where the design of the human brain conspires to frustrate you. Edge found it best to just walk away for a few hours, and come back refreshed







The control system is simple – appropriate actions map to the four face buttons on the pad, and are detailed in the bottom right of the screen. It's so intuitive it's barely noticeable





Broken Sword's facial animation system gives life to the well-paced script, The expressions make for funny moments

they say, or the way they say it, either. The magnificent facial animation system says as much as the dialogue, adding nuance to the simplest of lines. Delivered by dead-eyed mannequins, George's self-mocking quips would fall flat and Nico's Gallic sulkiness wouldn't seem nearly as appealing.

The characters have life and style when things go right. When things don't, *Broken Sword* begins to break down.

It is upsetting to watch, like seeing relatives stumble over their lines in a packed playhouse, and normally the interplay between the actors is fine, quickfire, smooth.

Occasionally, though – not all the time, maybe a few times an hour – a frame of George's animation will appear for a split second in the wrong part of the screen, or Nico will perform the wrong action in an in-engine cut-scene. It's not critical, but it splinters the illusion. Another month in development, perhaps, but given the precarious nature of independent development, another month and we might not have seen it at all. The other problem is the loading, which happens in bursts of around 15 seconds every time you move between the sub-areas in locations. These clusters of rooms are separated intelligently, so most puzzles can be completed without crossing loading boundaries, but they interrupt the narrative flow. It's particularly obtrusive when they bracket *Broken Sword*'s action events, one-shot *Dragon's Lair*-style moments intended to inject some adrenaline.

It's hard to be surprised by an out-of-shot enemy when his approach is signalled by a long pause and a whirring drive, you see.

That's technology, perhaps. **Edge** is no coder, but if it came down to losing some of the intricate detail, the beautiful lighting, Hollywood camera direction or spot-on voice acting for the sake of killing the dead time, it wouldn't change a thing.

Extravagance was one of the signatures of the graphic adventure: extravagance to bring them in, and a cracking story well told to keep them. Both tenets of the *Broken Sword* series remain intact here, and that's all the devoted fans could have wanted. A fairytale comeback.

They will buy this, but that's not enough. This is the adventure's glorious return, perhaps the start of a genre renaissance that can only serve to broaden gaming's appeal, or perhaps the final nail in a niche's coffin. **Edge** doesn't know which. In terms of narrative-led videogaming it is leagues above anything else in recent times, but recent times have not been kind to games that value story over instinct, intelligence over impulse. The unnoticed goes unappreciated, you see.

This, **Edge** genuinely hopes, will do something to change half of that.

The rest is up to you.

"This is the adventure's glorious return, perhaps the start of a genre renaissance that can only serve to broaden gaming's appeal"

Edge rating: Nine out of ten

Mario Kart: Double Dash!!

Format: **GameCube** Publisher: **Nintendo** Developer: **In-house** Price: **£40** Release: **Out now**



Balance has been replaced by exuberance, but in a bad way. Leaping over ramps and soaring into the air may look dramatic but it wears off very quickly, especially when you've been cheated again



It's a racing game, but *Mario Kart: Double Dash!!* is not a race for the other seven drivers on the circuit; it is a procession.

Which is how it's always been, of course – you'll recognise the distinctive catch-up chain from the (beautiful/brilliant) first game, and you'll also recognise the manner in which you weave amongst the file, rudely interrupting their planned formation. Maybe that break with village fête protocol is what has provoked their anger, what causes them to pelt you with their arsenal of Mushroom Kingdom weaponry. All the old favourites are there: banana skins, green shells, red shells – oh God, red shells, it's all flooding back – along with new special attacks unique to different drivers. You will be hit with a variety of them throughout the race, invariably, unavoidably. Again, it's always been like that, always carried that sense of impending doom, that fear as you approach the finish.

But in *Double Dash!!* that fear is more stark than ever. Small changes can break big things. Recall the original *Mario Kart*, where finishing fifth or below caused the player's vehicle to pop in a puff of smoke, and a retry was necessary to continue. Retrying took you back to the start of the race you'd just failed in, gave you another shot at glory. If you'd had victory ripped from you in the dying seconds, a homing shell sending you from first to fourth, you could shrug at fate, drop back another place, and use a continue to rewind time.

There are no retries in *Double Dash!!*. Finish fifth and the game gives you three points and sends you to the next track. Three points are worthless in the context of a structure where the finishing order is all but fixed. Winning the championship – which is what it's all about, surely – probably means winning three of the four races. But even if you take the perfect racing line, defend every red shell with a green of your own, even if you are the best karter in the country, you still cannot guarantee anything. In *Mario Kart Double Dash!!* your success depends on luck, on trial and retrial. Small changes...

...Bigger problems. This is a slow, slow game. Perhaps it's the comedown from *F-Zero GX* – a game which, incidentally, handles catch-up and field strength in a much more mature, joyous way than *Double Dash!!* – but even on 150cc there's little sense of speed here, nothing close to the feeling tearing round levels on the 16bit game, pushing your kart to the limit at each corner. In fact, there's rarely any test of driving skill at all. Even Rainbow Road is

"All the old favourites are there: banana skins, green shells and red shells along with new special attacks unique to different drivers"

Previously in E124, E125







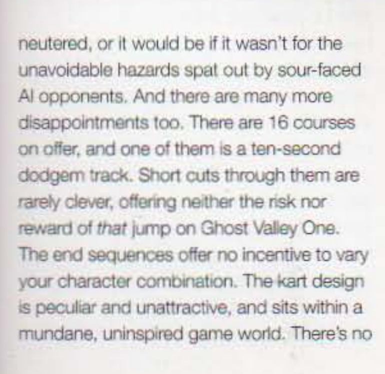








More characters, more vehicles, more choice? *Double Dash!!*'s mutation into something other than a racing game betrays its strong heritage





neutered, or it would be if it wasn't for the unavoidable hazards spat out by sour-faced AI opponents. And there are many more disappointments too. There are 16 courses on offer, and one of them is a ten-second dodgem track. Short cuts through them are rarely clever, offering neither the risk nor reward of *that* jump on Ghost Valley One. The end sequences offer no incentive to vary your character combination. The kart design is peculiar and unattractive, and sits within a mundane, uninspired game world. There's no hop, or control of your car when it's in the air. There's no rear view mirror. More, and more...

...Still, though *Double Dash!!* is undone by its own decade-old high standards, standards it comprehensively fails to meet, there are positives. It is often an *acceptable* game, an average one. The co-operative mode, in which one player drives and the other throws stuff, is neat, though mostly redundant given that most pairs will prefer to drive a kart each. The other multiplayer games (see Copious karts) are also entertaining, and would make tremendous additions to *Mario Party* or *Wario Ware*. They are not enough to drive purchase alone – that has to come down to the racing.

And that's the point, because *Mario Kart* isn't a racing game any more. It is a party game, and anyone buying it for anything more than frantic, foolish, social fun will grow tired of being cheated very quickly indeed.

Edge rating: Five out of ten

Copious karts

There are three multiplayer modes. The first has you collecting bombs from power-up boxes and throwing them at your opponent. The second is Nintendo's take on Tag or Capture the flag – one of the players gets a shine, and won't let go until he's hit with a weapon, the object being to hold on to the prize for a set length of time. The third is the classic balloon-popping game that all *MK* veterans will be familiar with. It's fun.

Prince of Persia The Sands of Time

Format: **PS2 (version tested), PC, Xbox, GC** Publisher: **Ubisoft** Developer: **In-house (Montreal)** Price: **£40** Release: **Out now (PS2), December 5 (PC), Q1 2004 (Xbox, GC)**



The intricate trap sections pay the most homage to the original. Usually played against the clock, they are stiff tests of timing and acrobatic improvisation

Move, think and fight. It's the distillation of adventure gaming, and *Prince of Persia* excels at every aspect of the trinity. In finding its own answers to the old-fashioned assumptions which dog the current generation of platformers, Ubisoft Montreal has elevated its Persian heritage to a new genre and a new standard. Principal among its inventions is the dagger of time.

Having been tricked into unleashing the malevolent sands of the title, the Prince must reclaim them with this magical dagger.

The more sand he collects, the more power he has to manipulate time, slowing and reversing it to meet his needs.

But first he must move. Instinctive and flamboyant, the Prince is capable of a whole new vocabulary of spins and scrambles and vaults matched by the peerless animation you were hoping for. It's never about pixel perfect precision, it's about momentum,

"The Prince is capable of a whole new vocabulary of spins and scrambles and vaults matched by the peerless animation you were hoping for"

imagination and glee. Tell the game what to do, and the game will do it for you. It doesn't remove the skill or the sense of achievement, it just gives you the feeling of being in control of someone who is magnificently good at what they do. The joy comes as the understanding crystallizes in your head of just how you're going to get *way* up there. The freedom of movement requires a new level of spatial imagination. Wall-running and jumping add an L-shaped dimension, rebounds let you zig-zag and twist in mid-air. Before *Prince of Persia*, platform games were like playing *Tetris* with only the blocks and bars.

This surety of control is vital, not just to your sense of freedom, but because the camera is not faultless. While often quick and intelligent, it sometimes lets the game – and you – down. But this isn't a disaster, because as long as you know in your head where you want to go, the game will get you there even when it's left you staring at an unhelpful patch of ceiling. And on the one-in-a-hundred occasions when it does let you down, you rewind and try again.

The continual puzzle of where to go and how to go there is made consistently pleasurable by the time control system. The rewind ability allows for experimentation, meaning you can try out routes and moves with confidence. But beyond this perpetual challenge, the Sultan's palace houses some vast head-scratching set pieces – rooms that soar four storeys and bristle with ledges and torches and mirrors and blocks. Piecing together the elaborate sequences will absorb all your attention and require you to take full advantage of the firstperson camera mode, and the fixed-point perspective that gives you a view of the full scope of the puzzle.

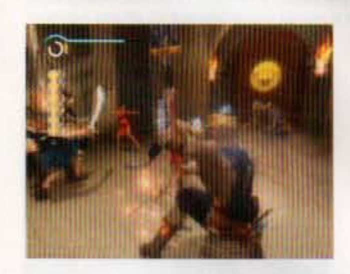
The structure of the game is seamless as you spiral in and out of the sprawling, stunning palace. From the heavy quiet of the catacombs to the wind-whipped turrets, the Prince's explorations unfold without the artificial restrictions of levels or bosses.

The contrast between the stillness of these puzzle-based passages and the explosive kinetics of the sun-drenched fights is pronounced enough to be actually shocking, leaving you temporarily reeling before you draw your sword and ready yourself for battle.

Combat is spectacular but not inherently complex. One attack command will trigger a dazzling sequence of spins, slashes and stabs, but you'll get no say in which happens when. Instead, the skill comes in manoeuvring. The trademark cartwheel attack, which you'll see in almost every promo screenshot, is useless against enemies with pikes, so you'll shift to diving under their feet or springing off walls. Once your dagger has collected enough sand you gain the opportunity to briefly freeze opponents, leaving them grey and splayed in mid-air until you choose to finish them. It can save your neck when caught in a ruck, but it requires some careful ekeing out. Freezing costs sand, and frozen enemies don't yield



The game is unspeakably beautiful, a visual tour de force both aesthetically and technically. The PS2 has never before played host to a world so carefully imagined and so immaculately realised

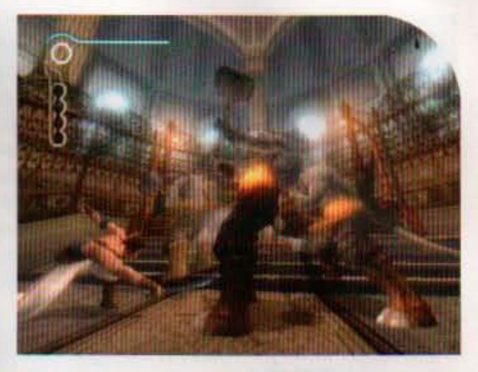


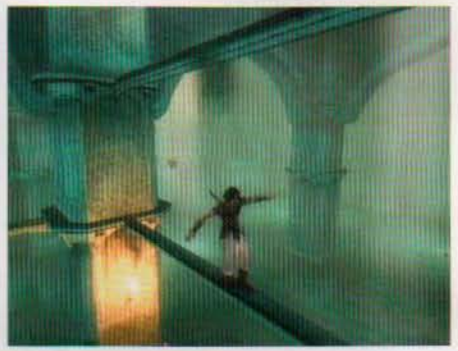
The main squeeze

Farah is with you for perhaps half of the game and although she can't pull off the acrobatics you can, she scrambles and leaps after you where she can, and never slows you down. She'll need protecting in some fights, but is a good shot with her bow and arrow. Her slight frame means she can wriggle through cracks and under doors, accessing areas – and switches – you never could alone. And while the romance never quite rings true, the game has a sensual sexuality about it that **Edge** hopes will usher in a new gaming trend.















any back when killed. So now you're leaping and rolling to freeze the most dangerous enemies while you harvest the sand of the weaker. By the time your dagger is charged up, and able to unleash one of the most spectacular, audacious and gratifying special attacks **Edge** has ever had at its command, battles become virtuoso performances.

And if, at any point, your tactics fail then you can rewind time. Take back those five seconds and you'll know exactly when that dead-eyed harpy is going to lunge at you, by which time you'll be behind her with your dagger in her neck. It turns every defeat into a tutorial, not a punishment.

There and then you have the chance to experiment with another line of attack. And another and another and another, because although you never face more than four or five opponents at once, when one is killed another appears. Some marathon brawls throw 25 or 30 enemies at you in an increasingly exhausting endurance challenge.

Although the re-spawning stops once the fight is won, it's a rare lapse of judgement, and makes for some nasty difficult spikes that are at odds with the flow of the rest of the game.

But the rest of the game cannot be commended highly enough. The second best platform game of all time? In *Prince of Persia*, that's just for starters.

Edge rating: Nine out of ten

Each save point – of which there are many – triggers a vision of what the future holds for the Prince. If stuck, it's often worth returning to watch it again, in the hope of glimpsing a clue of where to go and how to get there

Metal Arms: Glitch in the System

Format: **Xbox (version tested), GC, PS2** Publisher: **Vivendi Universal** Developer: **Swingin' Ape** Price: **£40** Release: **Out now**



On some levels a team of bots clunk along with you, smartly and reassuringly

Metal Arms reminds **Edge** of nothing so much as *Halo*. And, surprisingly, a little bit of *Super Mario 64*. Which doesn't mean it qualifies for a groundbreaking 20 out of ten.

In fact, as you'll have spotted by now, it doesn't even qualify for a ten. But while it doesn't have the scope, balance or polish of either of those heavyweights, it does a better job of learning their lessons than many of the tiresomely trumpeted '*Halo*-beaters'.

As Glitch, a humble but hardy mining droid, you are charged with protecting the robo-pastoral peace of Droid Town from destruction by renegade army bots, the MILs. And it's these enemies that are the first to trigger the comparisons – the shrill, panicky grunts are almost too cute to kill, the deadly Elite-style Titans force you to hone your tactics and skills, the clumsy shouldering of Flood-like bots who've had both their arms shot off. Even the later airborne bots swoop in with the eerie, deadly silence of a Sentinel.

"Your skinny machine gun – wonderfully named SPEW – matures into a relentless, thundering punisher of a weapon"

This isn't to accuse Swingin' Ape of copy-catting, since the central qualities these creations share with their Bungie counterparts are their imagination, execution and personality.

The parallels hold up in the weapons set, too. One of *Halo's* strengths is that every weapon in the game has its strengths and pleasures. In *Metal Arms* there are more weak links, but as you buy and discover upgrades, most reveal their thrill.

Your skinny machine gun – wonderfully named SPEW – matures into a relentless, thundering punisher of a weapon. The rivet gun makes for a pretty good needler, studding enemies with explosive charges that give them a few seconds to panic and shriek before arcing their fragments into the air.

Metal Arms' innovation is to allow the player to formulate combinations of the right arm guns and left arm fitments, so the basic kit of weapons can be augmented with scopes and slingshots, EMP grenades and remote control rockets.

While it allows for exuberant showboating, the tough final stages will call upon you to assemble all options at your disposal into a concerted and tactical assault.

Halo's emergent gameplay? *Metal Arms* has it in abundance, although it comes to light in less flattering circumstances. Due to some poorly-planned checkpoints, you may be playing a few extended sections over and over and over again. It's some comfort that the firefights may play out differently every time, as MILs cartwheel and blunder into unexpected positions, but it's a delight that soon greys into frustration. The inclusion of boss battles is a similar lapse. Repetitive and unforgiving, it's a style of play that briefly washes away all the freshness and innovation of the rest of the game.

The pacing, however, is carefully and ingeniously calibrated, with straightforward corridors-and-courtyard levels broken up with driving and shooting sections that don't fall nearly as flat as they usually do in hybridised games. Twice, Swingin' Ape introduces new and powerful enemies, and requires Glitch to slog through levels infested with them. And then the developer repeats the exercise in the next level, but with one simple twist – it finds a way to make you big.



Some of the twisting interior sections become a little claustrophobic. Emerging into the sunlight is a welcome change, although there is no denying that overall the game is a little too brown





Multiplayer options, including the brilliantly named Last Minute Effort, are unlocked by collecting the hidden chips which are tucked away on each level



Previously in E125, E127













Metal Arms is a vast game, and later levels are grindingly hard. It's not often **Edge** makes this kind of recommendation, but you may wish to consider taking advantage of the 'easy' setting

In a reversal as delightful as the tricks of Tiny-Huge island, Glitch gets a chance to go up against swarms of the robots which tyrannised him in the previous level, only this time they seem more like ankle-biters.

Mario shows his influence again in the way in which exploration is rewarded – most unpromising shafts and corners and peaks have a little something tucked round the back to make the journey worthwhile.

Metal Arms takes its robots very seriously. Rather than just being skins stretched over a set of generic enemies, their bolted-together nature means they can be just as easily dismantled. Under heavy fire heads are blown clear and arms sheared into useless flails.

Aside from comic value, and a certain barbaric satisfaction, this attention to detail has significant impact on the gameplay.

Slicing off a Titan's rocket-launching arm may give you enough of a respite to take out the grunts milling around him. Or take control of a fragile bot and eke every last ounce of use out of him as once-friendly fire takes out his head, legs and arm, reducing him to a stumpy grenade launcher.

Despite the quality of the game's heritage, there are problems that eat away at your enjoyment. The game starts slow, denying you tooled-up excesses until some way in. And the polish is off – some poor presentation and maniacally repetitive voice samples take the edge off the experience.

This is ballsy, confident, brash gaming at its best – a lesson in how games don't have to be perfect to be brilliant.

Edge rating: Eight out of ten

Ties that bind



Metal Arms' signature weapon, the tether gun, only appears comparatively late in the game. Creep up on suitable bots from behind and speargun a connection into their D-port to obtain complete control over them. It gives Glitch a chance to infiltrate enemy lines, and to experience the lumbering momentum and destructive power of the bigger bots. It reinvigorates multiplayer, too – you can choose a deathmatch where it is the only offensive weapon, forcing players to commandeer any bots they can find and fight it out by proxy.

Beyond Good & Evil

Format: **PS2 (version tested), GC, Xbox, PC** Publisher: **Ubisoft** Developer: **In-house** Price: **£40** Release: **Out now (PS2), December 5 (PC), Q1 2004 (Xbox, GC)**



As well as a staff, Jade is armed with a Gyrodisc, a hand-mounted gun that fires small discs when in camera mode. It can be used to click switches from afar, sever ropes or twang guards on the back







It's *Shenmue*, strangely, that first comes to mind. Within minutes of play, you're assaulted with detail and concepts: global warfare, psycho-karma, TV networks, pseudo-Buddhism, Italian holograms, porcine sidekicks and media propaganda. It's a lot to have to take in compared to the usual kindergarten tutorial, but the fact it's simply presented to the player instead of apologetically explained at every step as if to an eight-year-old makes it grand and interesting, something to savour before many buttons have been pressed.

Within an hour's play, you'll have had a dramatic fight, roamed a massive lake in a hovercraft, skulked in the shadows, maybe taken part in a race or a pursuit section if you found the right side tracks, photographed some wildlife, explored a busy town, subscribed to a newspaper and played an interesting bunch of sub-games while relaxing in a local bar.

In that time, you will have left *Shenmue* – a game that offers an experience through an enduring and grandiose gameworld, rather than any amount of cascading challenge. But whereas *Shenmue* was weighed down into sloth-like submission by the wealth of detail, *BG&E* is propelled by it. Well, kind of.

BG&E is a success. It's worrying when play feels so fragmented, especially during the opening hours, but the game doesn't dilute into an insubstantial nebula of ill-connecting genre set-pieces. In fact, as the game progresses, it focuses more on the core of the story – the uncovering of a conspiracy – and feels less prompted for it.

Affable lead character Jade is a freelance journalist who gets commissioned into the thick of the cabal. This sets the unique scene for a game filled with non-violent action – Jade's main weapon is her camera, and her special attack is recording incriminating data to be published in the underground newsletter. It doesn't deliver on this pacifist promise, however, as progress through the levels is just a combination of combat and puzzle-breaking.

The journalism is there only to serve the plot, the gruesome nature of the conspiracy that's about to be blown open. And it hits you hard when you realise you're only there to observe, and can't intervene.

Otherwise, it's business as usual: getting yourself into the precarious position where you can take these exposing exposures is a familiar, but polished, mixture of puzzle-solving, skulking and fighting.

Here's how they stand up: puzzles are mostly standard lock-and-key affairs, but there are a number of stand-out conundrums. Jade's movement is assured but ponderous, which means frustration can set in if the way forward isn't clear.

Stealth works very well and is almost always excellently framed with useful angles – you can snipe a guard's breathing apparatus from afar, causing any nearby look-outs to rush to his aid, allowing you to capitalise on the chaos. Combat is just a glamorous and slightly unwieldy button-bash, but involves some teamwork with your accomplice.

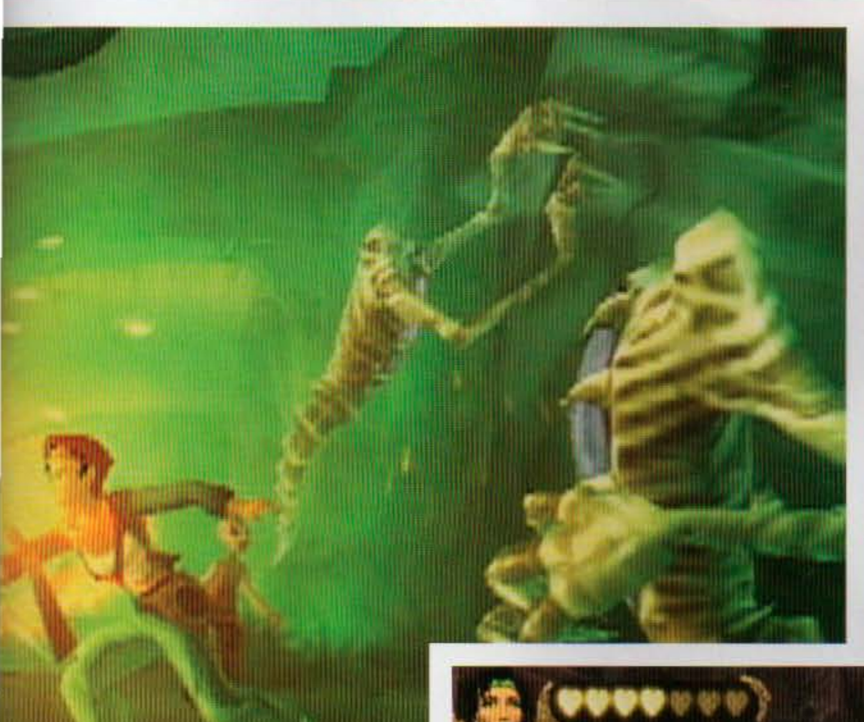
"A completely alien world, where lighthouses transform into laser-defence shields and sidekicks quote pages from teamwork manuals"





The bustle of the city on the right is simply for show; an impressive crossroads that cuts the world into quarters. Despite all the detail, there are few niches to be explored

Previously in E112, E124









Guards usually occur in pairs. Being seen often means instant death via a nearby laser cannon. Sometimes it's possible to neutralise the guards by shooting their breathing gear and then leaving them to struggle

With its sporadic bursts of complexity, *BG&E* succeeds in making you think just differently enough about things for it to all fit together with some kind of synergy. Your archiving sub-quest, for example (see Monarch of the lens) seems like a typical thing-spotting job, until you realise you can turn the camera on your fellow man. It's just different enough to play that, when coupled with the beauty of the game, it makes for an evocative and involving playing experience.

'Experience' is the operative word there. Much like *Silent Hill*, it's more about your role within the world and how things play out than an addictive and consuming game mechanic.

Coming back to your home town in between quests and seeing the effects of your actions ripple out into society – with increasing protests and civil unrest – is just as much a part of it as any stealthy set-piece, if not more. Hyllis is a gorgeous world and the abundance of ethnicity, although seemingly lazy to begin with, is actually successful in creating an otherworldly feel.

They've tried to deliver the Earth in the form of a completely alien world, where lighthouses transform into laser-defence shields and sidekicks quote pages from teamwork manuals as they charge into battle, and it's worked. It's lovely in its own special way, although the framerate does chug in places, and some of the hovercraft sections can really grate on the eyes.

BG&E starts out almost apologetic in its variety, seemingly trying to make amends for the callous repetition of most videogames. But when it finally commits to the more stable meat of the game, something truly engaging emerges.

The *Shenmue* disclaimer still applies: it's an 'experience' as much as a game, meaning that it will leave as many people cold as it grabs by the right half of the brain. It's an incoherent game set in a coherent world. Beyond good, then, but not quite excellent.

Edge rating: Seven out of ten



Monarch of the lens

Your camera can be used for a variety of things – such as taking a snapshot of a sign-posted map so that it becomes a permanent part of your inventory – and is pivotal in the line of main quests. An intriguing side quest, however, is your task to capture as many forms of life as possible on film. Or you could just raise it to the night sky, where it will lovingly point out constellations for you.

True Crime: Streets of LA

Format: **PS2 (version tested), Xbox, GC** Publisher: **Activision** Developer: **Luxoflux** Price: **£40** Release: **Out now** Previously in **E**112, **E**125, **E**128

You're driving to your destination and you notice a running track in an adjacent park. You smash through the railing and on to this Los Angeles green belt, for no motivation other than your own curiosity. You see a tiered spectator stand and immediately wonder what would happen if you attempted to drive up it. You do so at a low speed and your vehicle catapults away from it, end over end through the air, landing next to a house outside of the park. Weird, you think. You try it at top speed, and the game simply crashes.

True Crime is bugged. Any game attempting to recreate an entire American city would run such a risk, but games must be finished to hit that all-important Q4 slot, and this is what happens. However, this isn't as ambitious a project as its maker would have us believe. Its missions are compact and self-contained and, unlike *Vice City*, there are no aerial elements, so it feels more restrictive than Rockstar's freeform sandbox.

Clearly this impacts on gameplay, but Luxoflux attempts to redress the balance by incorporating a hand-to-hand combat system that's not nearly as complex as that of a dedicated beat 'em up but is deep enough to require more than simple button-bashing (against later opponents, at least). Gunplay is also more sophisticated than *GTA*'s, with training levels significantly enhancing your ability to take down opponents.

The 'good cop/bad cop' aspect is an interesting development, too, with the storyline branching in accordance to your respect for the rules (although the game is not entirely happy tossing aside morals: the only way to reach the 'best' ending is to toe the preserve-the-innocent line).

But *True Crime* ultimately suffers from comparisons to *Vice City*, despite its best attempts to duck and weave around the issue with its fighting and shooting mechanics. As a place, Los Angeles simply isn't as much fun as Liberty or Vice. And that's obviously because the real LA wasn't built as a plaything (well, not entirely) whereas Rockstar's caricatured landscapes clearly were. Too much of this silicon LA exists simply because the designers wanted to show that it could be done rather than because it serves any gameplay purpose.

Nevertheless, the best bits of *True Crime* are exciting, and at the very least this is something to chew on while you wait for Tommy Vercetti's next adventure.

Edge rating: Seven out of ten







A range of diversions break up the central gameplay, including sneaking into enemy territory (above), racing other cars and tailing enemy vehicles. Unfortunately, not a single one of these missions offers any real challenge. Technically, though, cramming in the streets of LA (left) is one heck of an achievement







Three types of training exist, although you don't need to develop your repertoire of driving manoeuvres in order to succeed. Focus instead on hand-to-hand combat and marksmanship (above). The characters may spout predictably clichéd drivel, but the game's many cutscenes (left) are directed with a little panache. As for the game's much-touted soundtrack, you get a pretty hefty slab of hip-hop for your money



The cost of ambition

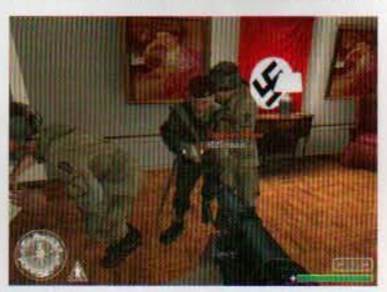
Perhaps *True Crime* could have done with another year or so development. Perhaps it would've also been better suited to another generation of gaming hardware, because the game shouts compromise at every turn, whether it's the meagre amount of traffic filling its streets, the bugs that see NPCs disappearing into walls and pavements, or the severely limited AI exhibited by other drivers. You'll have to grin and bear these deficiencies to get the most out of what is otherwise a solidly entertaining experience.

Call of Duty

Format: **PC** Publisher: **Activision** Developer: **Infinity Ward** Price: **£35** Release: **Out now** Previously in **E**125, **E**128









Vehicles have not been included in multiplayer, which is a shame, but as it was not able to compete with *Battlefield 1942* it's clear why





Buddy system

The fact that you are hardly ever alone in *Call of Duty* is one of its strongest aspects. The AI team will shout instructions, give covering fire and lob back enemy grenades. Best of all, though, is that they are competent and realistic fighters, who make the best use of their environment to overcome obstacles. The complexity of the AI means that emergent moments, such as hand-to-hand combat between friendly and enemy AI troopers, will often arise.





***Call of Duty*'s strongest facet is its variety. There's never a dull moment, with plenty of use of brutal gun-emplacements and sniper sections mixed in perfectly with ferocious house-to-house combat**

Brilliantly-judged firstperson shooters turn up on any format on only the rarest of occasions. Arguably, there hasn't really been any movement in the singleplayer sector of that genre since *Halo*. Nevertheless, there are still talented teams out there, such as the chaps who made *Medal of Honor: Allied Assault*. Now reformed as Infinity Ward, what is largely the same team has, with the release of this game, shown itself to be extraordinarily competent. *Call of Duty* is about the most fun you'll get on the PC this side of Christmas.

The game is relatively quick to complete, but in that time its scope is vast. Action includes fighting alongside US marines, British paratroopers and Russian conscripts. The missions range from daring rescues, Hollywood-style high-speed chases, fierce defences of strategic positions and massed assaults on ruined cities. One level even pitches players into the role of the commander of a tank platoon.

Visually, *Call of Duty* is competent but ageing. The audio is some of the best to be found anywhere, on any system. But it's the level design and the engaging manner with which your AI team-mates cope with the environment that really sets *Call of Duty* up as being exceptional. Soldiers react to suppressing fire, using cover intelligently, and moving to shoot when not endangered.

Likewise, team-mates react to covering fire and will move forward once the enemy are forced to get their heads down. A couple of the levels involve holding out for the arrival of reinforcements, with AI troopers aiding the player's desperate defence of a position. These are memorable moments, and a challenge players will return to time and again.

Infinity Ward's attention to detail is, on occasion, quite staggering. While this is a game that clearly takes fun as its priority, accuracy and realism are also part of the overall vision. Not least of these is the historical authenticity of everything in the game. The position in which the D-Day glider lands at Pegasus bridge is at the exact co-ordinates where it touched down in real-life.

Ultimately, *Call of Duty* is undersized and profoundly linear, but that cannot shake its solidity and the sheer intensity of the spectacle it creates. **Edge** just hopes that this is the last of the relentless torrent of World War II games, as no matter how good they might become, the rich source of inspiration is beginning to run dry.

Edge rating: Seven out of ten

Medal of Honor: Rising Sun

Format: **PS2 (version tested), Xbox, GC** Publisher: **Electronic Arts** Developer: **In-house (EALA)** Price: **£40** Release: **November 28** Previously in **E125**

Medal of Honor Frontline is only 18-months-old. Underneath the sound and the fury of its WWII wrapping, its problem was that (as the belated Xbox and GC versions were to make even clearer) it was already a veteran on release.

Rising Sun broadens the formula with online and splitscreen multiplayer, longer (but less numerous) levels and a change of cannon-fodder: this time, it's the Japanese and their chums in locales that include the Philippines and the Solomon Islands.

It's true that, in comparison with *Frontline*, there are occasional sections of play which offer a degree of choice and an illusion of freedom. It is also the case, when set against the earlier game, that there are signs here of of self-preserving AI in the computer enemies.

But *Rising Sun*'s missions remain variations on conventions. *Advance Wars* creates a mood of high-stakes military strategy. *Halo* one of battlefield disorder and desperation. *MoH*'s war, meanwhile, amounts to little more than *TimeSplitters* in combats.

Whatever the limitations of the game, though, there's no doubting its creators' belief in the value of presentational grandeur. By and large, *Rising Sun* takes itself deeply seriously, right down to the inclusion of patriotic extras that would make George W blush. Like *Frontline*, *Rising Sun* isn't the game of the war – it's the game of the movie of the war (just as its precursor did a 'Saving Private Ryan', so *Rising Sun* signals its aspirations with an almost entirely on-rails 'Pearl Harbor' stage). The inclusion of unlockables such as interviews with veterans are likely to appear pompous and ill-judged to some, and simply boring to everybody else.

On retreading the levels – and you will, as mid-level save points are not frequent or always easily found, and sudden ambushes are likely to spell doom on a first run – enemy attacks become predictable puppet shows, with mad-eyed soldiers lining up to get killed exactly where they did many times before. It's the kind of repetition more commonly associated with lightgun games these days.

There were occasions, prowling catacombs for life-ups in preparation for another bash at that big next showdown, when **Edge** yearned for the sparse corridors, technical limitations and more anxious atmosphere of the first PlayStation *MoH*. With this many restrictions and dictats, more is almost guaranteed to be less.

Edge rating: Five out of ten













Rising Sun has one neat tension-inducing trick: a couple of well-timed lunges from an enemy with a bayonet can be fatal – a rare incentive to pay attention when returning to already-visited areas



The game's selective dedication to authenticity extends to the relentless rat-at-at of its period weaponry. Those with neighbours or an aversion to tinnitus may find it all a bit much



Rough edges

Technically, *Rising Sun* is a mixed bag. On-rails sections still get weighed down by their pyrotechnic garlands, and when the framerate splutters and sags, so does the whole argument for trading player freedom for pre-scripted spectacle. Its freer, on foot sections vary too: the magnificent architectural edifices impress, while the super-thin, shamelessly-repeated textures do anything but.

The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King

Format: **PS2 (version tested), Xbox, GC** Publisher: **Electronic Arts** Developer: **In-house** Price: **£40** Release: **Out now** Previously in **E**124, **E**125







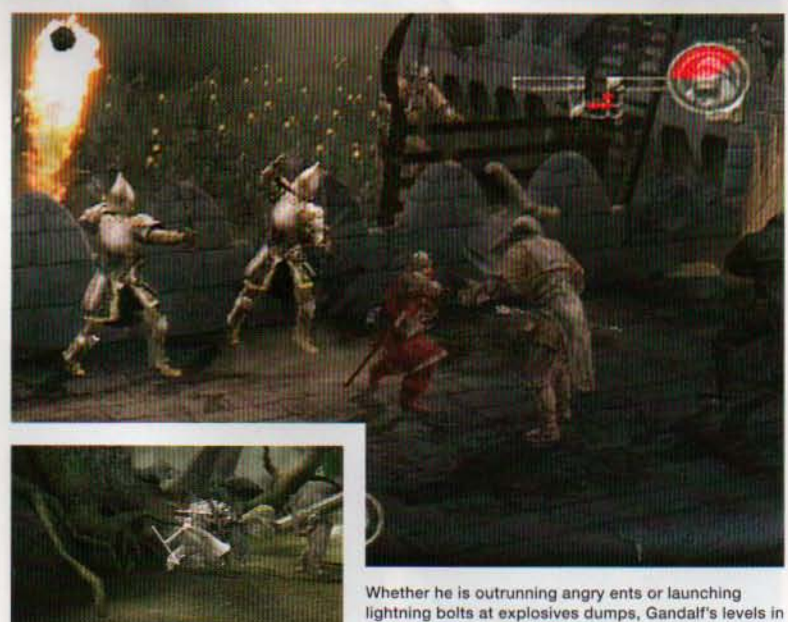


***RotK* is awfully pretty at times – in one Cirith Ungol sequence, light entering from above, dust from below, the view surpasses that of *Ico*. Elsewhere, it trumps the likes of *Devil May Cry* for sheer macabre style**



Going my way?

There are new character choices and a key shift of structure to accompany them – three main paths (hobbits, men, wizards) along which the game map can be traversed. Getting to the end with one character may be quicker than it was in *The Two Towers*, but can no longer be regarded as finishing the game – with two other adventures to play out, *The Return of the King* is broader and richer.



Whether he is outrunning angry ents or launching lightning bolts at explosives dumps, Gandalf's levels in particular evoke 'The Lord of the Rings' epic scale brilliantly. The added bonus of interviews with the likes of Elijah Wood round off a superb package

One ring, a third film and a second videogame to rule them all. Everything about last year's *The Two Towers* signified a new seriousness about elevating film-licensed software from belated, broken afterthoughts to interactive and near-equal adjuncts to the main feature. *Enter The Matrix* may have matched it for timing and cross-promotional coups, but the difference was that EA's game was surprisingly accomplished once the player took control, too.

The Return of the King naturally picks up where that game left off, but its battlegrounds are bigger and less restrictive. The camera remains resolutely fixed, however, but now it has yet more grand architecture and larger waves of orcs (it's not always orcs, of course, but they do seem to be everywhere) to fit in the frame too – all of which means that bouts of random and imprecise hacking can occur.

If *Resident Evil* can defend its dictation of viewpoint as being imperative for maintaining a cinematic atmosphere, then *RotK* must be forgiven too – for despite the sprawl it excels as a film-like 'experience'. The vocal contributions from the cast return with greater variety, and the luminous game map-menu outdoes those of the DVDs.

The lengthy level intros fusing film footage and game engine cut-scenes are even more elaborate and extended than before, but they're not a clue as to what's to come.

This is a stage-managed spectacle, of course, but the extra room to roam contributes to a more liberating atmosphere than the staggered tasks and subsequent stuttering pace of *The Two Towers*, and though interaction with the environment is strictly marshalled it makes for some deliriously hyperactive moments.

There are a couple of proper, old-skool bosses this time and, like even some low-tier opponents, they have been built to punish button bashing. Varied moves are essential not only for progress within stages, but also for levelling up and buying new moves. Along with the clear reward structure, it's a powerful incentive to strategically-slash 'em up, as is an all-new twoplayer co-op mode, which truly gets those *Gauntlet* juices flowing.

If you take away the window dressing, the epic sounds and the preordained surprises this is a derivative, one-note and sometimes flawed game, but see it as a spectacular amusement ride you can play and it's a distinguished achievement.

Edge rating: Eight out of ten

Grabbed by the Ghoulies

Format: **Xbox** Publisher: **Microsoft Game Studios** Developer: **Rare** Price: **£40** Release: **Out now** Previously in **E**125, **E**130

Ghoulies is beautiful. One of the most visually accomplished games this magazine has ever reviewed, it's saturated with imagination and artistry. But even when a game gives you this much to goggle at, it's never enough on its own.

Each room in the mansion is a self-contained challenge. Once the door closes behind you, you're unlikely to escape until you've completed the task set by the evil Baron. These start out as predictable game tasks, but become increasingly elaborate – kill six ghoulies within one minute without killing the same kind twice in a row. Some seem initially impossible, until you discover the wealth of hidden power-ups.

Cans of ingenious soup allow you to freeze your enemies, convert them to your side or become invisible. If you can't help but break the rules, the Grim Reaper will appear, killing all touched by his bony finger.

Smart players will soon use this to their advantage, deliberately summoning Death to take care of the tougher baddies while they backtrack to safety.

And so, by the end of the game, each room becomes a puzzle rather than a trial by fisticuffs. Which is no bad thing, since the combat can be simplistic and frustrating. The analogue attack system was surely meant to give an instinctive immediacy to the controls, but it somehow lacks any punch. Although some furniture is destructible, some isn't, and there's no way to predict what will smash. It leaves you stuttering out ineffective kicks that totally undermine the physicality of the world around you. Worse, it can make searching for that vital power-up – while the clock is ticking and the ghoulies are amassing – a frustrating gamble.

But overall the greatest disappointment is the lack of any sense of exploration or accomplishment. The game automatically adjusts your health up or down after every other room or so, which means good performances aren't rewarded and you never feel the satisfaction of digging yourself out of a hole. And although the mansion is packed with wonders, there's no feeling of discovery since the game manoeuvres you neatly from one room to the next. It adds up to a world in which you never feel truly connected.

Your goolies are safe, however. The worst this game will do is grab you by your hand and pull you along for a short, pretty but unsatisfying ride.

Edge rating: Six out of ten















The quality of characterisation throughout the game is breathtaking, with suggestive names and double entendres adding some adult kicks. Some of the crazier power-ups such as the Mini-Cooper cans (left) are impossible to use without giggling

Project Gotham Racing 2

Format: **Xbox** Publisher: **Microsoft Game Studios** Developer: **Bizarre Creations** Price: **£40** Release: **Out now** Previously in **E125**, **E130**

There's no denying that *Project Gotham Racing 2* is one of the most aesthetically accomplished titles ever produced. Minutely detailed scenery, gorgeous reflection maps, rich textures and accurate representations of 11 cities. Hours into the game you'll still be savouring the ample visual accomplishments.

Yet this doesn't stop *PGR2* from feeling a little heartless. Famous landmarks swing past your vehicle, giving the game a tremendous sense of place, but these are lifeless locales. It's a bit like driving through a videogame rendition of '28 Days Later,' only don't expect anything to shock or surprise. *PGR2* is only awe-inspiring in terms of the shininess of the cars, the detail of each individual headlight.

Significantly, the vehicles feel more weighty and responsive than in Bizarre Creations' original title on Xbox. While still not in the same league as *Gran Turismo 4*, the handling differences between even the most similarly matched cars are noticeable. Such nuances make vehicle selection substantially more engaging and favourites will keep coming out of your expanding garages.

Kudos returns, but the system is less exacting than in both *Metropolis Street Racer* and the first *Project Gotham Racing*. In the Kudos World Series the player selects a difficulty represented by steel, bronze, silver, gold and platinum medals. Achieve the specified conditions for a particular medal and a number of Kudos tokens are awarded. These can then be used to unlock vehicles, and you can open the next race by winning any medal, a structure that facilitates a frustration-free experience.

Rival AI has also been improved, and while there's never a sense that you are driving wheel to wheel against a personality, there are fewer incidents when your car unfairly careens out of control after the slightest nudge from behind. A more even-handed and complete package, then, but in terms of excitement *PGR2* is found wanting.

Locking the framerate at 30fps is part of it, but the real issue here is there's very little freedom to showboat, to have real fun. Ironic considering that Bizarre Creations has built the series around the idea of caning vehicles for extra points. Even in multiplayer and over Xbox Live performing that perfect handbrake turn is as gratifying as always, but generally, the driving is a little too clinical, too austere to elevate it to classic status. Don't be taken in by those shiny doorknobs.

Edge rating: Seven out of ten





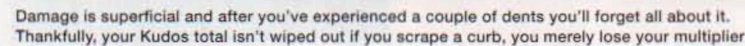











Damage is superficial and after you've experienced a couple of dents you'll forget all about it. Thankfully, your Kudos total isn't wiped out if you scrape a curb, you merely lose your multiplier



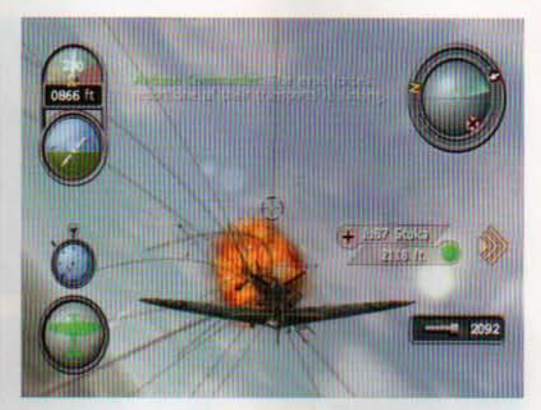
Garage games

Enter the virtual showroom and you can salivate over some of the world's most desirable cars without being pestered by salesmen. In the garage all the cars you've unlocked can be selected for the race at hand. But more impressive still, gathering dust in the corner, is *Geometry Wars*, a twitch game reminiscent of *Mutant Strike*. Using both analogue sticks (one to move your craft, the other to fire) you must fight to survive an arena full of angry shapes. It's a stimulating alternative to Kudos gathering.

Secret Weapons Over Normandy

Format: **PS2 (version tested), Xbox, PC** Publisher: **LucasArts/Activision** Developer: **Totally Games** Price: **£40** Release: **November 28** Previously in **E**125







Completing challenges in between missions unlocks additional craft, while meeting secondary objectives during missions allows them to be upgraded with improved armour, handling and types of ammunition







Although the majority of missions take place from the pilot's seat, there are a couple of missions that put players in the gunnery seat, which add a welcome degree of variation

Secret Weapons Over Normandy isn't a game that does anything obviously or overtly clever or innovative. But any game that takes such a simple premise and polishes it, hones it and refines it until it's this engrossing, this absorbing, and this much fun, is quite obviously doing something very clever indeed.

Care and attention are evident throughout, from the idents at the beginning to the suitably rousing 'Band of Brothers'-style score; from the slick cinema reels that preface each multi-part mission to the judicious learning curves that follow.

At its heart, *Secret Weapons* is about dogfighting. It's about acquiring an enemy target and sticking with it, doggedly, until it falls from the sky. That sounds simple, because it is. But from the White Cliffs of Dover to the azure skies above Africa, successive encounters build up, overlap and enmesh with mission targets or escort duties to bestow a symphonic complexity that's utterly captivating. Consequently the screen furniture, which appears cluttered to a bystander, quickly fades into the background for the player, as issues of control give way to in-the-zone absorption (indeed the option to enter bullet-time is freely available, to mimic the adrenaline-fuelled, zoned-out state combat pilots reportedly enter).

This sense of involvement never wanes across a substantive selection of missions and challenges (which are essentially shorter missions), and although it borders on being too easy, the game never feels unfair.

Additional modes include an instant action option to pursue objective-free combat, and a twoplayer mode that consists of various splitscreen missions, unlocked over the course of the game. While straightforward competitive missions frequently devolve into lengthy circling manoeuvres, the co-operative and competitive co-operative missions are more than adequate compensation.

No doubt the arcade handling will offend the sensibilities of flight sim pedants, particularly sitting alongside such an apparently authentic (and sizeable) selection of flyable craft, and the sensation of speed is initially difficult to gauge. While *Secret Weapons* is hardly a paradigm shift for the medium, it's still a peerless example of the game designer's art, sacrificing formal experimentation in the pursuit of polished execution. The result is utterly satisfying and totally captivating.

Edge rating: Eight out of ten

Did you know?

The German battleship Bismarck was sunk because its sophisticated anti-aircraft batteries couldn't be adjusted to track a target flying as slow as the Fairey Swordfish biplane (a technologically outdated craft that continued to be used by Allied forces throughout the war as a torpedo bomber)? Nor did **Edge**, but this internet-researched nugget is just one example of the extent to which *Secret Weapons* breeds an engagement with its subject matter.

Need For Speed Underground

Format: **PS2 (version tested), GC, Xbox, PC** Publisher: **Electronic Arts** Developer: **In-house** Price: **£40** Release: **Out now** Previously in **E125, E126**

EA could have simply rehashed another instalment in its *NfS* series featuring the latest supercars. Instead it realised that today's gamers have grown up admiring tricked-out versions of everyday vehicles.

Taking illegal street racing as its theme allows for some interesting play modes within a US city downtown setting. Circuit, Time Trial, and Knockout races are expected, of course, but the inclusion of Drift and Drag options adds significant variety, and the latter provides some of the game's finest moments, requiring you to perfect gear changes and learn when to unleash the nitrous oxide while keeping an eye out for competitors and avoiding the civilian traffic. On the other hand, Drift rounds should satisfy even the most demanding powerslider.

It's not just what your car does but how it looks while doing it that counts. The main mode sees you rewarded financially for successful exploits on the streets, which allows you to customise your ride and increase your credibility rating (see Hoon heaven). But it's a more restrictive model than, say, *Gran Turismo*'s – upgrading isn't limited by your financial status but rather predetermined by *Underground*'s pace. A decent player will always have money to buy the parts, but the game's structure won't allow purchases until it's ready. The wait between the three upgrade levels will test the dedication of more impatient players.

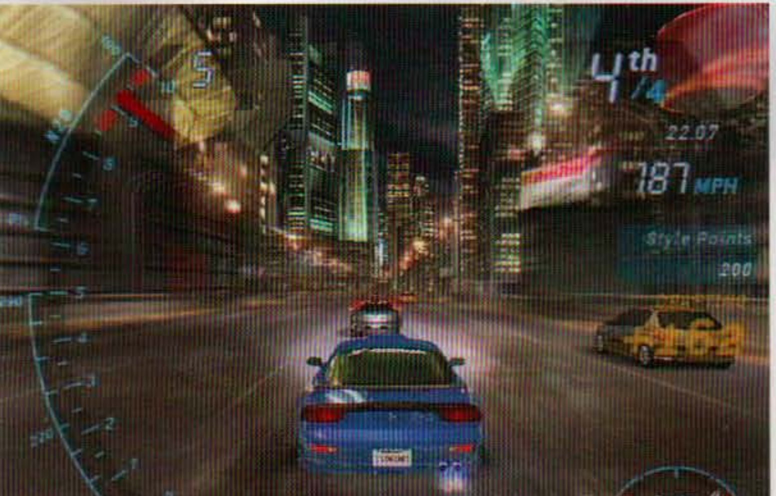
Once on the streets, the closest comparison is probably *Burnout 2*. Here too, *Underground* comes a close second. Criterion's racer possesses something special, the myriad moments of sheer immersion that EA's offering is unwilling to hand out with the same generosity. (When they do turn up, their intensity is unquestionable.) And like *B2*, *Underground* is beautifully detailed, with impressive lighting, accurately modelled protagonists and a terrific sense of speed, but somehow it fails to gel in the same way, possibly as a result of the handling. It doesn't feel as solid, the cars seem less firmly planted on the ground, while the limitation of the collision dynamic (most evident during crash replays) is responsible for the unpredictable nature in the way your vehicle reacts to its surroundings. This unreliability eats away at the player, and can be the cause of much frustration. Somewhat flawed, then, but a refreshing and captivating direction for the series.

Edge rating: Seven out of ten













The sensation of speed is superb, particularly when you unleash the nitro (right). Circuits are initially confusing but offer plenty of shortcut opportunities. On PS2, there's a twoplayer splitscreen mode



One of the drift circuits (above) – switching off traction control increases the powerslide potential. Crashes involving civilian traffic lack the dynamism of those of the *Burnout* series



Hoon heaven

The game's structure locks you in to the proceedings with the bite of a Brembo caliper. It's a feeling few in the genre have managed to evoke as imposingly since the last major instalment from Polyphony. Vinyls, decals, bodywork, lights, neon, tail pipes, and obvious mechanical upgrades are all areas that require your attention – you personalise your vehicle as you would your character in an RPG. For those with a penchant for cars and tuning the excitement of adding a new component to your vehicle and seeing its effect on the road is a powerful incentive to keep playing.

SWAT: Global Strike Team

Format: **Xbox (version tested), PS2** Publisher: **Vivendi Universal** Developer: **Argonaut** Price: **£40** Release: **Out now**

Previously in **E**125, **E**128











While the architecture is occasionally simple, the textures are often excellent and nearly on a par with the lush wall-porn of *Halo*. Levels are worth repeating in order to gain the bonus medals available for good performance, too



Both a tech/explosive expert and a sniper accompany the player, making for a team of three. You can't switch between them, although certain levels allow you to take the role of the sniper for short sections or whole stages



Voice of reason

X is your 'SWAT! GET DOWN ON THE FLOOR!' button. Tap it once to neutralise an enemy unaware of your presence, or bash it repeatedly to convince someone less willing to give up his weapon. The Xbox and PS2 headsets can be used as a more pleasing, if slightly delayed, alternative. You can also issue verbal commands to your team, who will respond promptly and with aplomb.

It's called the compliance meter, and it's up there with any of Sam Fisher's terrorist-foiling gadgets. A semi-circular bar under your reticule when you hover your sights over a target, it's core to the *SWAT* experience.

It's best when it's flashing, so a single resounding yell (see Voice of reason) will shock the perp into submission. Once they've seen you, they can still be convinced to give up (indicated by the bar filling with blue) with a non-fatal bullet to the shoulder or a barrage of intimidating commands. If it turns red they're either about to cry for mercy, or keel over.

Subduing terrorists without the use of unauthorised force is the heart of the strategy here, and it's necessary if you want to earn points and upgrade your weapons. It's also pretty much the sum total of the experience.

Unlike Ubisoft's own anti-terrorist-'em-ups, there's little facility for tracking or detecting enemy movement. No map, no thermal vision and few audio cues other than loud conversations make it tricky to apply many tactics outside of replaying the level.

The tendency for enemies to spawn only when prompted makes the proceedings lean toward action – terrorists run in from stage left when (and only when) your team-mate begins to defuse or hack something, making it difficult not to resort to thoughtless blasting to make your way through. And despite the impressive and obligatory post-*Splinter Cell* lighting effects – rotating fans split shafts of light and the like – there seems to be no scope for using the shadows.

Missions feel repetitive all too quickly, and rarely deviate from the linear. Most levels feel like functional riffs on a small intestine of rooms and corridors. Stages with any real scope, such as the sub-LA sewer network and the Russian power plant, are few.

Which is a shame, since the AI of your squad is fantastic. No idiocy, tardiness or tragedies here, just obedience and reliability.

Certain missions split your team, giving you control of your sniper (plus an excellent rifle) as she takes to higher ground. These set-pieces make for an excellent break of pace, but are rare and feel under-played. There are neat touches: you've got infinite ammo, brilliantly, and inhaling gas leaves you with a temporary cough that ruins your aim.

So, the weapons are all present, correct and raring to be exploited, but it needs a few more tactics to make it more than the sum of its admittedly solid parts.

Edge rating: Six out of ten

Tom Clancy's Rainbow Six 3

Format: **Xbox** Publisher: **Ubisoft** Developer: **Red Storm** Price: **£40** Release: **Out now** Previously in **E126**

Rainbow Six 3 has managed to create some high expectations. Game of the show at Microsoft's recent X03 corporate jamboree, and backed by the pedigree of Tom Clancy's world of spies, soldiers and naughty terrorists, this title rides high on the wanted lists of a great many gamers.

Formed from spare body parts left over from PC iterations of the *Rainbow Six* series, and dressed in the finest *Splinter Cell* graphics, this is tactical shooting remade for the Xbox demographic. The PC versions have been intensely tactical affairs, pushing forward planning and tactical thought, but the seemingly inevitable console dumbing-down has turned this into a quite different affair.

Playing more like a rambunctious firstperson *Splinter Cell*, you and your team of three fellow hard-men conduct the usual bomb defusing, hostage rescue and stealth as part of a bland plot involving oil and evil.

The mechanics of moving and shooting are as good as can be expected – nightvision and thermal visors add a sense of realism and subterfuge as you sneak about.

While the AI of enemies can be incredibly stupid, with bad guys happy to stand around waiting to be shot, the AI of your own team is impressive. What's more, they can be ordered about by simply shouting orders into the headset. Shouting is required, as anything less than the most commanding tones will tend not to work – forcing the player to adopt the persona of their Special Team avatar.

Sadly, this is a stupefyingly linear experience. While the individual stand-offs and shoot-outs are exhilarating, the removal of any sense of choice or any requirement for tactical thought makes this more of a theme park ride than a military operation.

Many doors are nothing more than scenery, while others will magically open when certain arbitrary conditions have been met. You feel as if you are being herded from set-piece to set-piece, experiencing heavy scripting rather than heavy warfare.

The scripted nature of the game makes the staid and sterile plot seem all the more predictable. There is no feeling of involvement in an evolving situation because there is no evolution here, just a straight path from start to finish with a few exciting firefights along the way. Not terrible by any means, but the lack of passion or choice means that attention will have wavered long before the world has been saved. Again.

Edge rating: Six out of ten







Shouting at your fellow soldiers is nothing new in videogaming, it's just that now they will actually respond. Use of the 'Zulu' command allows the team to be set specific objectives







The thermal and nightvision goggles add an air of military 'cool' to proceedings that cannot be underestimated. Doesn't make shooting a static soldier any more rewarding, sadly



...your enemies closer

With System Link and Live multiplayer options, the heavily scripted nature of the singleplayer mode can be forgotten and the number of deadly scenarios possible is limited only by the player's cunning.

How it will stand up to *Counter-Strike* in the battle for ownership of the Live warfare arena remains to be seen, but the lush graphics and presence of a single player mode may well see it ending up in many more game collections.

Atsumare!! Made in Wario

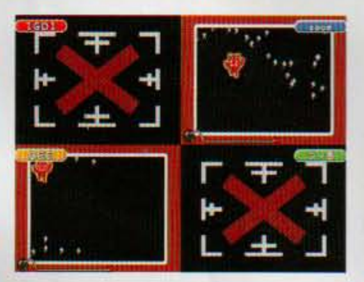
Format: **GameCube** Publisher: **Nintendo** Developer: **In-house** Price: **¥6,800 (£37)** Release: **Out now (Japan), TBC (UK)**









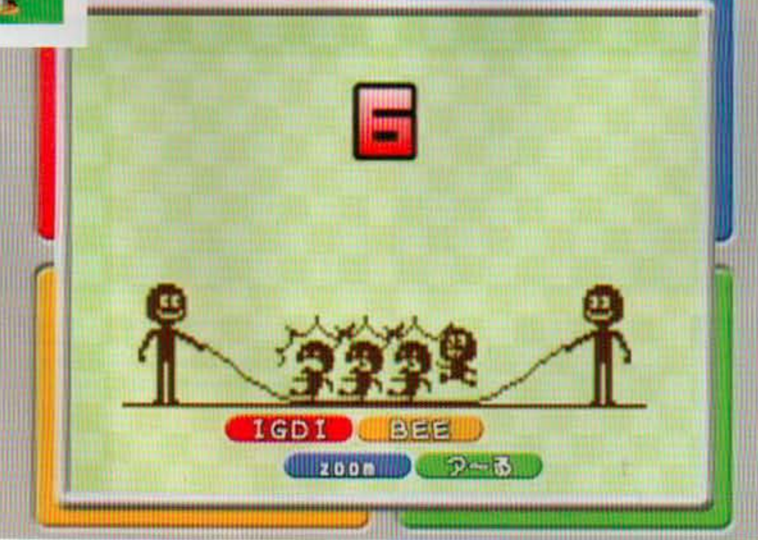






Wario where?

There's no news yet of a PAL release, although the warm reception to *Wario Ware, Inc* might offer some hope. Only Mona's level is unplayable in Japanese, as her deranged doctor gives written instructions on what physical pose to hold while playing each round. The RPG question-and-answer boss makes a return in the singleplayer mode, but isn't enough of a language barrier to prevent you completing the game.



Co-operative skipping triggers a deliciously hypnotic hysteria. Other co-op modes include one which gives each of the non-players a torch beam to light the crucal portions of the darkened main screen

It should be the ultimate party game for partying gamers. *Mario Party* for the hardcore, stripped of the dismal snakes and ladders, nothing between you and the purest hit of distilled gaming instinct. And, fundamentally, that's exactly what it is.

Which doesn't make it the ultimate party game. Far from it. To those uninitiated in the frantic ways of *Made in Wario* it's off-putting to say the least. And to those whose instincts are not honed by years of in-game jumping and stomping and shooting it's more like the sound of one hand slapping them in the face every three seconds. Familiarity is all, so the only level playing field is between sets of novices or veterans, and it's the veterans who will have the most fun. However, since the whole of the *Made in Wario* GBA singleplayer game is included, nobody has an excuse to stay a novice for very long.

Drawing on its bank of hundreds of minigames – most, but not all, familiar from the GBA pioneer – it stacks them up in a number of guises. Some are simple. There's a karaoke-themed level which amounts to little more than a turn-about challenge. Others up the ante a little. Wario lets your character run rampant over the screen, obscuring the view of whoever's turn it is to play. Dribble and Spitz preside over a game of space 'Othello', with players capturing counters (or rather asteroids) by winning minigames.

What will capture your heart, however, is Kat and Ana's level. Each round opens with a micro-minigame decider. Close to being more fun than the game itself, these see you sticking fingers up revolving noses and dragging yourself along like a paraplegic ninja.

The winner gets a go at a minigame. Win, and each of the other players gets a turtle to balance on. Whoever survives the ensuing turtle-teeter stays in the running for the next mini oddity. Repeat to collapse.

The minigames remain relentlessly addictive, but the whole falls slightly short of its potential. Many of the levels are unsatisfying without a full complement of four players, and there's no random set-up for the kind of protracted grudge matches the game makes you long for.

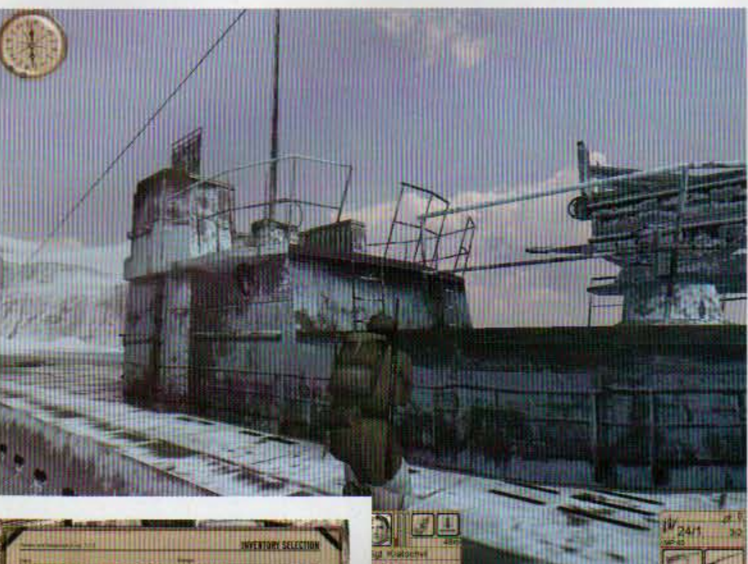
The GBA original invented a new way to tickle your brain, conceived by gamers for gamers and loaded with unabashed enthusiasm. And now you can play it with your friends. What better excuse for throwing a party?

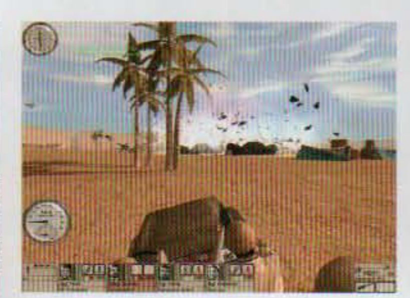
Edge rating: **Eight out of ten**

Hidden & Dangerous 2

Format: **PC** Publisher: **Take 2 Interactive** Developer: **Illusion Softworks** Price: **£35** Release: **Out now**

Previously in **E**123, **E**124, **E**125











Sharing a graphics system with *Mafia* leads to a similar look, with high-detail models in a world which seems relatively low in detail and texture



Complete control

Three ways are offered to guide your squad of four SAS men around each level. First, and most simply, is direct control, allowing you to swap between each trooper and manoeuvre by hand. One step up is verbal orders, where a series of short cuts can give directions to nearby troopers – or with a hand signal so as not to alert nearby guards. Finally, for the more strategy minded, you can pause the game and enter an RTS-styled overhead ordering system.



Hidden & Dangerous 2 keeps the freeform gameplay of its predecessor and occasional *Deus-Ex* style multipathing appears, with alternate options opening up depending on your choices and actions

For those who wish to decry PC games publishers' tendency to release games possessing baroque, unpolished control systems additionally warped by a full compliment of bugs, the original *Hidden & Dangerous* was something of a poster child.

Luckily, it also showed what an untethered PC game could achieve. The first major breakthrough game from eastern Europe, paving the way for the triumphs of *Operation Flashpoint* and *Serious Sam*, it was starkly atmospheric, hugely expansive and far too ambitious for its own good.

This long-developed sequel doesn't deviate an inch from this proud lineage.

Though the feat of being less bug-riddled than the original is not the greatest of achievements, and could be managed by simply not allowing any of the cast to mysteriously plummet through the floor, it is a far cleaner beast. It's far from perfect, especially with an artificial intelligence system that tends towards truancy on the part of your soldiers. Some errors are artefacts of the control system, where multiple commands interact in odd ways, while others are simply the AI acting unpredictably all on its own.

But, like its sire, *Hidden & Dangerous 2* manages to distract you from errors that would cripple a lesser game through its sheer ambition and scale. Your four-man team, controllable either through direct or indirect methods (see Complete control) is taken through virtually every theatre from WWII.

After several years in khaki and olive daub we may be somewhat tired of what this offers, but the depth and options in *Hidden & Dangerous 2* make it seem new again.

Take one mission from the Burma campaign which draws analogies with the famed beach-landing sections of *MoH: Allied Assault*. The slower pace and panicked rushes up the Japanese earthworks, as well as the interaction of your squad, turn it into something different. Every mission performs a similar trick of rejuvenating well-used material – when it hasn't found something new like the amphibious theft of an Enigma machine or the Vietnam-styled Burma levels, that is. Even standards such as vehicles and disguises are far more sophisticated than expected.

Hidden & Dangerous 2 is a maximialist PC action game containing elements from across all genres. Still flawed but still forgivable, it's one of the finest WWII games of recent memory.

Edge rating: Eight out of ten

Judge Dredd: Dredd vs Death

Format: **Xbox (version tested), PS2, GC, PC** Publisher: **Vivendi Universal** Developer: **Rebellion** Price: **£40** Release: **Out now**

Previously in **E125**, **E126**

This review is late for a reason. It's one that some may be aware of: allegedly, unfinished beta builds were accidentally sent out as 'finished' review code to numerous magazines, causing Rebellion to issue a statement saying as much.

So **Edge** waited for the boxed game and, well, there appears to be no difference.

The very same trio of glitches that were experienced in the troublesome 'review' code cropped up again within the retail copy: the spontaneous combustion of your character during the second level, despite the locality being devoid of flame or enemies. Getting trapped behind an invisible wall on a lift and a disobedient NPC who refused to acknowledge he had been rescued in the hospital, thus forcing a level restart.

So, it's glitchy, then. And the main game is over in hardly any time at all. *TimeSplitters*-style bonus game extras are available for improved performance and replay, as well as standard co-op and multiplayer modes, but the game seems to lack any of the tactical options to necessitate replaying.

Your main objective is the bane of the modern FPS: following a little blue arrow while shooting things, with the odd escort or protect responsibility thrown in to make you turn around occasionally.

Which is a shame, because *Dredd vs Death* still has some redeeming strengths, foremost of which is its atmosphere. Excellent music and some moody corridors work together to suck the player in while ragdoll physics do their ironic job of adding lots more life to the melee, and make for a gruesome posthumous distraction as you shunt corpses around like, well, rag dolls.

The recharging health system works well, and succulent amounts of blood get spattered around during combat. Zombies are fun to fight when they're in droves, as are human adversaries, but the agile and tough vampires are a frustrating annoyance. Much like *Fire Warrior*, the visuals work with a range of garish hues and there are some beautiful backdrops that, although static, provide a detailed frame to the exterior levels.

The pump-action gunplay is satisfying, too, mostly thanks to the range of weapons that, although generic, pack an accomplished and palpable punch, and are great to wield, albeit in combat free from set pieces and tactics. It's average justice dished out to the licence, but nothing more.

Edge rating: Five out of ten







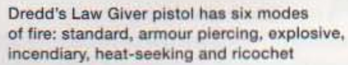


Dredd's Law Giver pistol has six modes of fire: standard, armour piercing, explosive, incendiary, heat-seeking and ricochet



Except for the showdown with Judge Fear, the battle with each of the Dark Judges is not a tit-for-tat shoot-out, although the alternative here is the disengaging task of having to flick some switches





Arresting development

Dredd's law meter keeps tabs on the amount of justice he dishes out. Keeping it high with righteous arrests and minimal casualties is key if you want to unlock all the bonuses and attain a Judge Dredd rating; you can yell at crims to persuade them to lay down their guns. If the meter drops to a Bad Lieutenant low, then the mission is instantly failed and all other Judges in the vicinity will turn on you.

Amped 2

Format: **Xbox** Publisher: **Microsoft Game Studios** Developer: **In-house** Price: **£40** Release: **Out now** Previously in **E**123, **E**125







Amped 2 is considerably prettier than its predecessor but improvements extend beyond aesthetics, with many elements now refined to make this, along with EA's *SSX3*, Edge's favourite snowboarding title



Amped 2 is *Amped* with the right trigger gently pressed: it's tweaked. Balance meters take away some of the series' grace, but make it more of a game, like *Tony Hawk's* tilted downwards.

Conversely, the addition of a style meter is pleasant, albeit counter-intuitive. Extra points are awarded if the player manages to perform twists and turns with gentle, flowing motions of the analogue stick, discouraging the violent wrenches that generally define tricking games. Snow skating, that's snowboarding without your feet tied to the board, isn't much of an addition. It's just another tweak – you can do kickflips, sometimes you lose your board, and that's essentially it.

The addition of proper online competition, on the other hand, shouldn't be underestimated. *Amped 2* is a show-off game, and being able to show-off to real people rather than just for the benefit of self-satisfaction adds a good deal to the experience. Conversely, planting your head in a drift of snow is so much more painful when there's someone watching. It's this that will provide the real draw for owners of the original.

Edge rating: Eight out of ten

Tony Hawk's Underground

Format: **Xbox (version tested), PS2** Publisher: **Activision** Developer: **Neversoft** Price: **£40** Release: **Out now** Previously in **E**127, **E**128

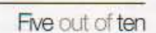
A group or movement seeking to explore alternative forms of lifestyle or artistic expression." That's just one of the definitions **Edge** found for the word 'underground' in the 'Concise Oxford English' dictionary. It's safe to say that Neversoft has not tweaked the *Tony Hawk's* formula enough to fulfil that description. Instead, what you get is a tawdry backstory involving pimps, drug pushers and hoodlums. Underground, see?

Playing through *THUG* can be uncomfortable, and **Edge** can't remember a game this gratuitously tacky since *BMX XXX*. Grind the roof of one fluorescent building in Tampa and it falls in, revealing a poorly animated lapdancer. Cheap thrill.

The fifth *Tony Hawk's* title doesn't just suffer because of its embarrassing attempt to be edgy and urban, it's poorer because it lacks the verve and imagination so prevalent in previous iterations.

As if the grey hues have drained Neversoft of inspiration, *THUG's* tasks and challenges never reach previous heights. New *Hawk* devotees will find it enjoyable, but old hands will no doubt prefer the more vibrant earlier versions.





Edge rating: Five out of ten









In this new *Tony Hawk* world it's possible to drive vehicles around the streets, but only during specified missions. These sections smack of a desperate attempt to diversify into *GTAIII* territory. On a more positive note, the game is big and there are more extras here than ever before. It would appear as though Neversoft has run out of ideas for objectives, however

Crimson Skies: High Road to Revenge

Format: **Xbox** Publisher: **Microsoft Game Studios** Developer: **In-house** Price: **£40** Release: **Out now** Previously in **E125**, **E130**

Pirates of the Caribbean' has recently made hammy actors waving cutlasses fashionable. Lucky for Microsoft, then, that this pirates-in-planes update of the PC original (**E**91) was delayed so long it's been able to tap into the current vogue.

You play Nathan Zachary, a freebooter in a distorted post-Great Depression universe where ferrying cargo can provide great riches. Unlike most games of this type, the mission structure is surprisingly open-ended. A huge blimp provides a haven for the planes you've collected and upgraded, while goals can be hunted out by flying around the outside world and pressing 'X' near to the designated icon. In the singleplayer campaign there's always more than one quest to pursue and there's enough variety to maintain interest.

But *Crimson Skies* really comes to life online. Up to 16 players can duke it out in the skies and the dogfights are terrific. Team games help to bolster the simple aerial warfare and good tactics always win out over random bullet spraying. The fun won't be as enduring as *MotoGP*, but this is better than you'd ever have expected.

Edge rating: Seven out of ten









Spot a green AA gun icon on the ground and if you fly near enough a press of the 'X' button will see Zachary seamlessly exiting his craft and climbing into the stationary weapon emplacement. This adds a much needed strategic aspect to combat and spices up the online play immeasurably. Extra combat manoeuvres can also be triggered with the deft manipulation of both analogue sticks

World Rally Championship 3

Format: **PlayStation2** Publisher: **SCEE** Developer: **Evolution Studios** Price: **£40** Release: **Out now**









While *WRC3* visually shows elevation and terrain from all the official events, the sensation of moving across surfaces from sand to ice is not so well conveyed. Power drifting, so beautifully realised in *Colin McRae 04*, is less dynamic here

Is it as good as *Colin*? That's no doubt what you're thinking and, if we're honest, reviewing any non-Codemasters rally game always boils down to this central question. The bar was set so high by *Colin McRae 04* that Evolution Studios' third *WRC* game needed to do something special if it was to become the best in the genre. It hasn't.

The draw here is that you get a fulsome official package: all the teams, all the drivers and all the courses (beautifully recreated and inclusive of this year's new event in Turkey). To WRC followers the added thrill of negotiating the very same mountain passes traversed by Gronholm, Solberg, McRae et al is powerful, yet in terms of communicating the excitement of the rallying itself, *WRC3* falls short.

Although the physics engine has been tweaked to produce more convincing bumps, knocks and crashes there's still an artificiality about *WRC3* that lets it down. A good quality steering wheel improves matters, but it's still hard to shake the feeling that your vehicle isn't properly rooted to the ground as the scenery clips by. *WRC3* is entertaining, but it's a full minute behind *Colin*.

Edge rating: Six out of ten

Bombastic

Format: PlayStation2 Publisher: Capcom Developer: SCEI (Shift) Price: £30 Release: Out now Previously in E115







There's not as much depth as *Tetris* or *Puyo Puyo*, but there's not much that disappoints about *Bombastic* apart from a rather lacklustre platform game that's been bolted on. The deeply involving puzzle mechanics build brilliantly on foundations laid down by *Devil Dice*



In case the mechanics of the original *Devil Dice* are unfamiliar, it's possible to unlock them over the course of *Bombastic*: manoeuvre your character to match up faces (connecting five fives or four fours, and so on) to make them disappear. When the board is full of dice, it's game over.

Bombastic builds upon this simple premise by having the dice explode, sparking off chain reactions igniting surrounding dice showing a similar value. It's a superb addition, adding strategic depth without being too complicated.

Once the original rules have been opened up, the twoplayer mode is just as addictive as it ever was, making up for the rather disappointing fiveplayer Wars mode (available in either *Devil Dice* or *Bombastic* flavours) which is a bit too frantic, too reliant on luck, to be truly satisfying.

Bombastic also introduces a platform element, which proves entertaining enough – apart from bosses that leave too much to chance – but it's the standard puzzle mode which is the main thing here, and that's as absorbingly addictive as any gamer has a right to demand.

Edge rating: Seven out of ten

The Temple of Elemental Evil: A Classic Greyhawk Adventure

Format: PC Publisher: Atari Developer: Troika Price: £30 Release: Out now Previously in E126

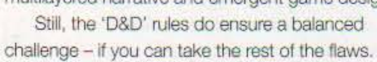
Nasty, brutish and short – and that's once you've got past the interface problems. *Temple of Elemental Evil* is a huge disappointment by any measure, even more so compared to the 'D&D' precedent set by BioWare's *Baldur's Gate* series that Troika seems to be attempting to ape.

The lack of useful keyboard shortcuts, a finicky radial menu and useless inventory and map screens ensure that navigating the interface is a major chore, from memorising spells to swapping items between party members. Conversation trees are limited and frequently betray information that characters aren't supposed to have knowledge of, or ignore the outcome of previous dialogue.

Near non-existent pathfinding renders the exploration a frustrating affair, and the much-vaunted party alignment system is merely cosmetic, and consequently feels unfairly restrictive.

After all that, the hack 'n' slash emphasis of the fairly short campaign feels outdated in an age of multilayered narrative and emergent game design.

Still, the 'D&D' rules do ensure a balanced challenge – if you can take the rest of the flaws.



Edge rating: Four out of ten









Interface problems range widely across the game, from combat to conversations (after which your control inexplicably and unnecessarily switches between characters). To compound matters, a zingy synth soundtrack sounds more appropriate for a cyberpunk world than the game's swords and sorcery setting



Assault Suits Valken

Edge takes a fresh look at a seminal game classic from yesteryear

Format: **Super Famicom** Publisher: **NCS Masiya** Developer: **In-house** Release: **1993**

At a time when the majority of mech-based games either fall into the RPG or strategy camp, it's pleasing to see one whose only concern is with action.

Assault Suits Valken begins as a shoot 'em up and not once during its seven levels does it deviate from its core premise. Cleverly, NCS offers a variety of play styles to combat the inevitable repetitiveness. It's an ingenious design decision, one that ultimately guarantees Valken its many standout moments – where else can you begin a level battling your enemy in space after sabotaging his spaceship, continue fighting while entering the Earth's atmosphere and conclude your conflict once your mech's feet are stomping firmly on the ground?

While this 'variety' forms part of the game's undeniable attraction, *Valken*'s superior atmosphere is actually the major contributor. True, the music isn't the finest yet heard, but it does manage to convey a sense of urgency, and the visuals make up the shortfall by working Nintendo's 16bit hardware harder than most. The convincing elements, however, are to be found in the detail: the way the scenery is destructible and able to bear the scars of combat, the sight of enemy pilots abandoning their doomed machinery, or even the excellent animation's ability to transmit the feeling of controlling a five-storey-high military exoskeleton, to name three examples.

It's not just the weight of the mech that is communicated beautifully through the joypad – the controls have been mapped onto it instinctively despite all of the major buttons being assigned a function. You can boost jump, fire, change weapons, perform dash attacks, position-lock your firing arm, and shield yourself from enemy bullets. The latter injects an element of strategy, and occasionally elevates proceedings above mindless action by forcing you to adopt a more tactical approach – a necessity when the 'continue' screen is limited to three appearances.

Ultimately this remains a shoot 'em up at heart, and one of the finest **Edge** has encountered. Longevity is an issue, but the scale of the levels and the variable routes through them are powerful incentives for replay.

Edge rating: Eight out of ten







Stomping along the ground or flying through zero gravity, your beautifully animated mech is an agile beast. Enemy human soldiers that occasionally appear help maintain a sense of scale (above)



There are four weapons in the game – vulcan, punch, missiles and laser – and each can be upgraded a further two levels before maxing out. You do this by collecting power-ups throughout the missions



Retrospective

Time may have dated *Valken*'s audio/visual ability but it hasn't damaged the game's great sense of atmosphere or the rewarding nature of its balanced dynamic. The variety of the situations you and your robust mech find yourselves in maintains a level of compulsion similar to that experienced when the game was originally launched – quite an achievement for a piece of software nearly 11-years-old. Obviously, it feels (wonderfully) old-skool but if anything the plot's ecological overtones seem more appropriate now than ever.



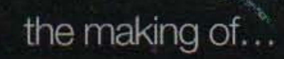


The making of…

X-COM: Enemy Unknown

(aka UFO: Enemy Unknown, aka X-COM: UFO Defense)

Currently keeping the strategy flag flying with the highly successful Laser Squad Nemesis, Julian Gollop recalls the development of the title that first brought turn-based wargaming to the masses…



Right about the time the first generation of home computers were making their presence felt, tabletop strategy and role-playing was at its zenith. Wargame titles were readily available for the re-enactment of every major conflict in the history of man, while fantasy gaming went far beyond the reach of Dungeons & Dragons to encompass deep space adventures such as Traveller and even literary adaptations based around characters such as Edgar Rice Burroughs' John Carter of Mars. It was only a matter of time before such gaming found its way onto the computer screen.

Armed with hex maps, the Americans got there first but, in the UK, many got their first taste of computer-based strategy gaming courtesy of **Julian Gollop**. Having designed two Redshift-published titles, he went on to code a third (*Nebula*), before really making his mark with the 1994 release of *Chaos* and *Rebelstar Raiders*. His next move was to form Blade Software with brother Nick, the pair working together on 1988's *Laser Squad*, a winning evolution of the Rebelstar turn-based sci-fi strategy formula.

Strategy wargaming had become, if not quite a mainstream concern, then at least a profitable one for the Gollops. So much so that, with the success of *Laser Squad* and their next title, *Lords of Chaos*, the

Original format: **PC, Amiga**
Publisher: **MicroProse**
Developer: **Mythos Games**
Origin: **UK**
Original release date: **1994**



brothers found themselves getting bogged down in the management side of their business. When the time came to begin work on a second *Laser Squad* game they took the decision to focus on development.

"I remember when our little office was piled high with *Laser Squad* expansion kits and mountains of Jiffy bags, with no room to work very comfortably," recalls Gollop. "We were doing some good business, but we wanted a worldwide publishing deal, and so we needed to find ourselves a big publisher."

In 1991, armed with an early demo of *Laser Squad 2*, the game that would ultimately become *X-COM: Enemy Unknown*, they approached Krisalis, Domark and, finally, MicroProse. The latter was their favoured publisher because of its experience handling Sid Meier and his *Civilisation* strategy game.

"When we first got the contract with MicroProse we were very pleased but concerned about what they might require us to do," he says. "We did have a few arguments in the beginning because they didn't understand the game design I had written. They couldn't see how the game was going to work. I had a tough job trying to explain it, and I had to produce a few more documents and attend a big meeting with their in-house designers, producers and head of development," said Gollop.

The original demo was for a relatively modest, two player tactical game. MicroProse asked them to base the action on Earth and to expand on the original design to deliver something more in keeping with the other epic strategy games it already had on its roster.

"That prompted me to add the strategic level, with the basic idea of an alien infiltration of earth and the need to capture and research the alien technology to defeat them. It was quite a radical design in many respects, but we were trying to create a grand scale that would rival that of *Civilisation*. In fact the research and technology tree somewhat emulates the role of advances in *Civilisation*, but it also helped to develop the storyline."

Inspiration for the organisation carrying out these activities came from SHADO in Gerry Anderson's 'UFO' TV series, and also from Timothy Good's book 'Alien Liaison'.

"After reading that I knew I was on to something good. The whole alien conspiracy angle was quite exciting, and the mind control powers of the aliens he described were chilling," said Gollop.

"The book explained some of the alleged attempts by the US government to capture and replicate the alien technology, and even make some kind of secret deals with the aliens. All this would find its way into the game in some way."

At its core, though, the game remained true to the turn-based strategy wargame roots of *Laser Squad* and the *Rebelstar* games.

The AI system was based on that used in the earlier titles, the Gollops having developed and refined their own unique algorithms for pathfinding and behaviours.

"We made sure that there was an element of unpredictability in the AI which often made it seem more intelligent than it actually was."

Gollop remembers the last two months of development, January and February of 1994, as a particularly difficult and intense time. Having relocated to work at MicroProse's Chipping Sodbury offices, twelve-hour sessions seven days a week were the norm.

"We went to MicroProse to finish the game in-house with something that was barely playable," admits Gollop. "We had to finish the coding and do all the testing at the same time, and so were making changes right to the end. It is definitely not the right way to do things, and the game would have benefited enormously from another couple of months of

"We made sure that there was an element of unpredictability in the AI which often made it seem more intelligent than it actually was"





Playtesting proved troublesome, because of the time it takes to work right through the entire story



The switch to 3D maps was a radical move for the team. Although simplistic by today's standards, the engine was notable for its use of lighting and the ability to destroy terrain

testing and tweaking without major changes to the code.

"It's a miracle it turned out so well, but there was a slightly embarrassing bug – the difficulty level setting made no difference. When you saved the game and reloaded, the difficulty was set back to the lowest. However, it didn't make much difference because the game had internal balancing mechanisms, which made it challenging. The other bug was the one that allowed your soldiers to become superhumans, sometimes to such an extent the values could overflow to zero and make your supermen instantly useless."

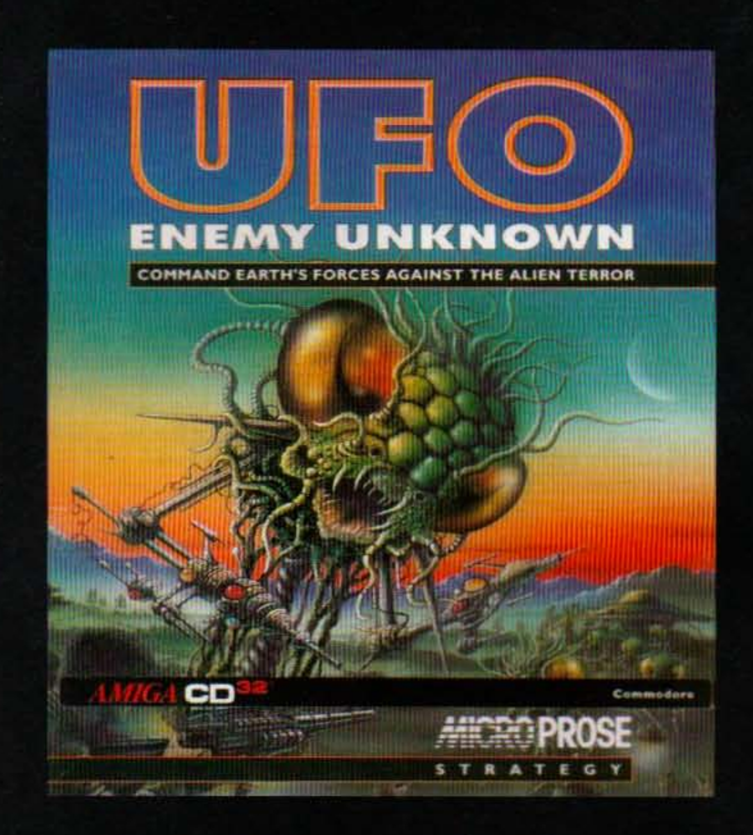
It's a miracle the game got released at all, given the financial difficulties MicroProse was experiencing prior to a takeover by Spectrum Holobyte.

"We were generally unaware of the problems at MicroProse and only learned later there were a couple of occasions when the project nearly got canned. We were certainly concerned about the Spectrum Holobyte takeover, but our producer kept reassuring us that everything was fine. Little did we know that Spectrum Holobyte didn't like the game at all. By that stage it had gone into testing and the QA team really argued hard to keep the project."

The game launched to massive acclaim, and went on to sell more than 600,00 units on the PC platform alone (with Amiga, CDTV, CD32 and even PlayStation conversions also produced). Half of the sales for the PC version were in the USA, a rarity for a European title at the time.

Gollop believes the title may have given it a boost, as while the European edition was originally known as *UFO: Enemy Unknown*, the American version was titled *X-COM: UFO Defense*.

"I think the release of 'The X-Files' the year before the launch of *X-COM: Enemy Unknown* helped a little. Although we hadn't seen the 'X-Files' at the time, we were drawing on the same UFO folklore for the game, and this hit a nerve in the US."



It was after enjoying success with this first *X-COM* game that the real problems began. "Once MicroProse realised that they had a money-making machine on their hands they wanted more of the same and they wanted more say in the project. We felt that we no longer had much control over our creation."

MicroProse licensed the code to produce a follow-up, *X-COM: Terror From The Deep*, and the Gollops worked on one last title, *X-COM: Apocalypse*, before leaving the franchise behind. Forming Mythos Games, they produced *Magic & Mayhem*, but then a second game suffered difficulties at the hands of another publisher. Mythos closed its doors and the Gollops returned with Codo Technologies, a new play-by-email *Laser Squad* game, and an alternative means of self-publishing.

"We realised that we could easily produce and distribute *Laser Squad Nemesis* on the internet with minimal costs, relying on our own customers to sell the game by challenging their friends and other non-subscribers," explains Gollop. "These days this is called 'viral marketing,' but it is basically just word-of-mouth over the internet."

Rather than rely purely on the power of the web, Codo also inked a deal with Just Play to bring *Nemesis* to the UK high street, retailing for just £13 with three months of online play for free. A European release is also planned, along with a web-based interface that eliminates the need for email based play.

"Some time next year we will have a singleplayer version of LSN for sale, which will certainly be popular with fans of the original *X-COM*," adds Gollop.

Codo will also take that fascination with online wargaming to its ultimate conclusion with *LSN: Generals*. A massively multiplayer addition to the franchise, it will add strategic elements as base building, resources and team management.

The *X-COM* name may be long dead, but the Gollops' much loved brand of strategy gaming is clearly still in rude health.





Even now the format and themes in *X-COM: Enemy Unknown* inspire developers, most obviously with *Silent Storm* and *UFO: Aftermath*

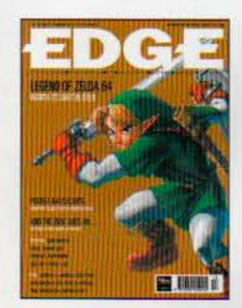


RESET

Where yesterday's gaming goes to have a lie down

reload

Examining gaming history from **Edge**'s perspective, five years ago this month



Issue 66, Christmas 1998

Pop quiz, score-o-philes! Was **E**66's Testscreen section the best ever? Of the eleven games reviewed, four of them scored an eight – roughly equivalent to full marks in many other magazines. Another two games scored a nine, an off-the-scale score elsewhere. And then there was *Ocarina of Time*, wrapped in a gold cover and given a golden mark: **Edge**'s third 'perfect' ten, a number so high that lesser reviewers across the country had to break out the oxygen masks when they saw it. **Edge**'s scribe was breathless, too: "The game singlehandedly restores the faith in both the creative might of Nintendo and in the power of the videogame as an entertainment medium," the magazine wrote. "A work of genius," it concluded, exhausted, dizzy and priapic. For those of you who aren't aroused by numerical porn and actually read the magazine for the articles – **Edge** has reason to believe there are actually some of you out there – the issue also contained plenty to consume. As well as an apologetic (and now corrected) re-run of the previous month's *Black & White* feature (see **E**130), **Edge** looked at rhythm action, pocket gaming, and ran an interesting interview with Andreas Whittam-Smith, then president of the BBFC. There was also a piece on important events in videogaming, binding 16 unconnected occasions into a fascinating – if slightly random – read. But hey, who needs history when you're making it yourself? 10/10! Ten out of ten! Quick, someone tell the internet!

DID EDGE REALLY SAY THAT?
"Mega Man took me ages to build, but recently someone pulled him apart, and now I can't find his head. Similarly, somebody recently cut one of the arms off of [Final Fight's] Guy with a scalpel," **Edge**'s then-art editor Terry Stokes explains his macabre workstation.

DID THEY REALLY SAY THAT?
"*Metal Gear Solid* is a registered trademark of Konami UK and the rights to sell this game in the UK are held solely by Konami UK. Should it come to our attention that these registered rights are infringed, we may take up enforcement proceedings or our rights in the relevant courts." In summary: Please stop importing *MGS* or Konami will stamp its feet a bit.

TESTSCREENS AND RATINGS:
Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time (N64, 10/10), *Half-Life* (PC, 9/10), *TOCA2: Touring Cars* (PS/PC, 9/10), *Populous: The Beginning* (PC, 8/10), *Wargasm* (PC, 8/10), *Tomb Raider III* (PS/PC, 8/10).


1



2



1. *The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time* causes some arousal in the **Edge** office 2. While Boogie Nights of a different kind were to be had with Konami's *Beatmania* 3. Only five years ago, and ads like this still existed 4. Furbies, in happier times 5. *Pocket Muumuu*, the third in the *Jumping Flash* series and the first game to support Sony's PocketStation 6. **Edge** spots an opportunity to get a free meal via some clever page layout 7. *Silent Hill*'s Takayoshi Sato, back before the series' success gave him the opportunity to get his hair cut 8. Pocket Battlechips. Snigger 9. The second best game in issue 66 10. Team 17's mock-up shot of Spectrum *Worms*, to promote *Worms Armageddon*



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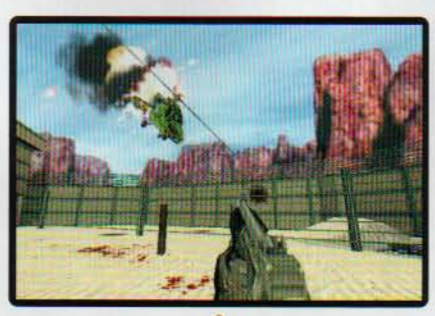


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Or email (stating 'Inbox' in the message header):
edge@futurenet.co.uk

I would like to address the way videogames are represented on television.

A few years ago there was an excellent show called 'GamesMaster'. It may have not been the most informative or the most entertaining show it could have been, but it was a television show about games. It had real gamers presenting and real gamers playing on it. It was the only source of news and information on a screen without delving into the internet. Unfortunately it was cancelled, probably due to a high demand for shows ending with the words 'from hell', and we were left with our magazines and websites.

That was until Channel 5's 'Thumb Bandits', with its unwatchable starting time of 1am and inappropriate bad language, 'Thumb Bandits' was doomed to a quick demise. Since then there has been a deluge of inadequately created programmes from the long running, but behind the times, 'GamePad' on Bravo to the recent but incredibly patronising 'Gamesville' on Sky One.

What I'm getting at here is that although there are countless channels devoted to music and plenty devoted to movies there is still not one decent programme devoted to videogames.

Not one 30-minute-a-week slot in which real (and I stress the word real) gamers could discuss and review the latest games and developments in the industry. But, unfortunately, we are a minority group to the programme schedulers. To them the hardcore gamers are a useless bunch of people. This was demonstrated by ITV's 'Game Stars', which may have had a handful of people who knew what they were talking about, but was mainly populated by eye candy. It appears clear that there is barely any chance of a high-quality programme solely about games ever appearing on television.
Peter Basma-Lord

After finally catching an episode of BBC2's brilliant 'Time Commanders', I found it to be enthralling, entertaining and enlightening. Surely this is how videogames can present themselves, head held high, to a sceptical public. How has this gone so unheralded in the gaming press? Surely it's everything you were after, **Edge**, isn't it? Meaningful and primetime?
Rob Donald

'Time Commanders', like 'Fightbox', isn't exactly a primetime programme about videogames, it's a show that uses imagery and concepts drawn from the world of videogames. While this is admirable in their own right, there clearly is a lack of airtime given over to videogames, in spite of the medium's massive cultural significance to a whole generation – and the commitment of our state broadcaster to other forms of entertainment such as music and film. Hopefully, though, these programmes demonstrate the beginning of a shift in attitudes towards videogames, and hopefully we can now begin to look forward to a future which doesn't include the moronic likes of 'Gamesville'. It will be interesting to see how far 'Game Stars' will evolve in the light of such shifting attitudes.

With great interest I have followed the discussion currently unfolding in your magazine, contemplating the presumed lack of originality in game development, and the lack of respect games get as an art form. Sadly, the exorbitant amounts of money made in the industry seem to disappear in creating an even vaster quantity of mediocrity that makes for idolisation for games of yore or oddballs like *Rez* or *Ico*.

Though the accusing finger has been pointed at the industry itself and consumer behaviour, an overlooked aspect is the context within which innovation in creative fields seems to take place.

In any other creative field, say music or art, it is the individual artist with a vision who seems to make for the most radical changes. Working with determination towards externalising the dream stuck in this person's head, the motivation is probably best described by Jeff Minter in the article published in **E**120: "I want to finish it because I want to sit and play it." The recent specials looking at the creation of old favourites painfully show the difference between the context in which the heralded bedroom-coders operated and the current situation – the technology to publish bedroom projects on any platform is outside the financial grasp of any potential bedroom coder who goes without the support of a publisher. The individual struggling to carry out his vision sees his quest complicated by a lack of software and funds.

Without these people no field progresses, though any field benefits from having a small group of renegades who experiment in a vacuum outside the conventional frame and create things that explore and inform the industry. Electronic music would never have made the leaps is has if it hadn't been for initiatives like the BBC's Radiophonic Workshop, art in itself consists solely of innovators and imitators. It is this self-generated playground that constitutes art, and as long as formats are explored to increase sales and not for the love of innovation the games industry will be taken less seriously for its artistic endeavours, nor will it reach its true potential.
Marc van de Griendt

Recently I have entered the wonderful world of massively multiplayer online games. I have played some for a trial period, and am now playing one as a paying customer.

Of course **Edge**'s reviews have been of importance, as have other various (online) sources, before committing to a game.

This new pursuit has raised two questions. First, reviewing an MMOG at the end of beta may give some indication of the gameplay on offer, but revealingly even the **Edge** reviews speak of hope more than actual play experience (the *PlanetSide* and *Eve Online* reviews). Perhaps an additional review some six months down the line might give the reviewer the opportunity to share a more relevant tasting of the experience on offer.

Secondly, I am curious about the state of MMOGs (not online play in general). Which games are actually profitable, after millions upon millions must have been spent to get the game to the

"What I'm getting at here is that although there are countless channels devoted to music and plenty devoted to movies there is still not one decent programme devoted to games"



F-Zero GX. Rest assured that it's really, really good, regardless of its creator's monthly column in Edge. Although we would say that, wouldn't we?

public? Is it still worthwhile for a publisher to enter the market with what must be very doubtful returns? Does the monthly fee cover costs of keeping the persistent world persistent and, more than that, enjoyable over a longer period of time with additional content? Such and other questions answered in an in-depth **Edge** article would be much appreciated, and certainly enlightening.
Jeroen van der Valk

A high-profile advertising campaign to increase understanding of modern games among the general public is long overdue. I am sure that most people in the real world consider games to be divided neatly between two categories: those aimed at children, based around the collection of magical lollipops or some such; and those that corrupt children, involving shooting people and stealing cars, possibly with a large dose of misogyny thrown in for good measure. If we look at the way games are marketed, who could argue with this view? Isn't this exactly the sort of thing ELSPA should be doing? Wouldn't this be of more benefit to the industry in the long term than lobbying MPs or handing out gongs at posh dinners? With millions of people being told about 'evil' games by their newspapers, we need to try to reach those people with a different message.

Fear of that which is different or unknown to us has been responsible for many tragedies throughout human history. Education is the most valuable tool we have. So, publishers, stop looking for short-term profit by marketing every game with the same guns-and-breasts advertisements and box art. Invest now for the future. You never know, with a bit of thought and a bit of planning, it might even encourage more people to walk into a games shop with a loaded wallet in future.
Chris Preston

ELSPA's decision to lobby MPs is in fact part of exactly the sort of education strategy that you advocate. Indeed, in the past month, the trade body has also attempted to launch a campaign educating consumers and retailers about its new age rating system. Hopefully, there are some signs that publishers are beginning to invest in the future.

I am a frequent reader of your magazine, and noticed with some amusement your recent inclusion in 'Private Eye' (Pseuds Corner, October 3). As a keen gamer myself I like to see such optimistic comparisons between computer games and more traditional forms of art. However, it does occur to me that a characteristic of a number of good films and other emotive art forms is the theme of rule-breaking. Witness the sheer number of films about criminal activity. By contrast a frequent characteristic of good computer games is the consistent rules of their environments, without which the player can feel lost.

To get to my point, there appears to be a rather unfortunate dichotomy here between computer games and other art forms. In other art forms the artist or artists work intimately together to create a consistent work. They can break rules together. In a computer game the programmers create the world and the player the action.

There are two separate parties trying to write the same story. This may help to explain why *Enter The Matrix* broke the rules successfully, but failed to be an engaging computer game. It may also have something to do with how *Shenmue* could be quite compulsive but often felt on rails.

I find myself wondering if a computer game can have an emotive plot and be fun to play without simply alternating between cut-scenes and action.
Peter Westmacott

The new issue of your magazine (**E**129) was an outstanding issue, and especially good, I feel, were the bold cover and the range of features. It was the report on Sega's new direction that has compelled me to write to you.

Is it ethical for **Edge** to review games developed by Toshihiro Nagoshi and his team, given that the aforementioned Sega producer has a regular column in the magazine? I hesitated to address the matter, because this question could easily be misinterpreted as an allegation against what the magazine stands for, but I have to admit the question has made me think. I am certain you must have also discussed this internally, but I would just like to know how **Edge** stands regarding this matter.
David Teixeira

Rest assured, **Edge** is nasty enough and arrogant enough to review every game objectively – regardless of its origin. We have plenty of friends in development, but we don't mind upsetting them.

Maybe I'm talking out of my hat here, or maybe I'm tighter than the average **Edge** reader, but I don't think that I have ever bought a game purely on the off-chance that it might be better than I expected (Testscreen Intro, **E**130). I haven't won the pools, don't deal in drugs or gold nuggets, so I'll be damned before I stumble into my local games shop and press £40 into the sweaty palm of the be-acned counter staff without first making doubly sure that my prospective purchases are going to be worth my while.

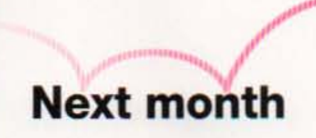
I suspect that the game collections of your readership are the result of an informed process, with information gleaned from your pages being the most valuable arbiter. And as for what we're buying during the drought months of the summer, there's a whole back catalogue of quality titles out there to choose from.

Anyway, I'll get off my high horse now, except to say: £1,000+ a year on games? Christ on a bike, are you all mad?
Chris Ward

I just thought I'd mention that it is not wise to feed hedgehogs bread and milk, contrary to convention, as it upsets their digestion. A small bowl of dog food is recommended instead.
A L Palmer

Even lightning-fast blue-skinned hedgehogs? 

> "So, publishers, stop looking for short-term profit by marketing every game with the same guns-and-breasts advertisements and box art. Invest now for the future"



Next month






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